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Consolidation and News Content:

How Media Ownership Policy Impacts Local Television News

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Consolidation and News Content:

How Media Ownership Policy Impacts Local Television News

by

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Dedicated to:

Mary Emerson, Robert Smith, my four loving sisters, and especially my grampa, C.L.

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Consolidation and News Content:

How Media Ownership Policy Impacts Local Television News

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In 1999, the Federal Communications Commission changed the Local Television Ownership Rule, allowing a single company to own two television stations in the same media market. This longitudinal case study analyzed the newscasts of one of the nation's first so-called duopolies. The author sought to discover what kind of long-term impact ownership consolidation had on newscasts in Jacksonville, Florida. Using a quasi-experimental research design, she first compared the newscast content of two stations when they were separately-owned. After consolidation, content produced by the duopoly was compared with pre-consolidation newscasts. 60 newscasts and 1,048 stories were analyzed. The researcher set out to answer the question: Do the combined resources of two television stations translate into higher quality local coverage? Results were mixed.

The author empirically measured diversity and localism – two factors critical in the examination of broadcasting in the public interest. Diversity was operationally defined as range of topics, topic of "lead" stories, and range of voices. Results show the duopoly significantly increased its coverage of local government, politics, construction and growth but decreased its coverage of public safety and non-dominant groups. A shift away from crime coverage was seen for lead stories. There was no significant increase in the number of local sources, women, or minorities included in news coverage.

Localism was operationally defined as the amount of locally-produced news, the geographic diversity of coverage within the Designated Market Area, the number of reporters featured, and the amount of enterprise reporting. Results show the number of stories and time dedicated to local news increased significantly. Regarding geographic diversity, however, the new duopoly owners did not maintain a commitment to coverage of South Georgia news – a commitment made by the competing station before it was absorbed in the duopoly process. Allocation of reporters to news coverage did not increase. While the number of enterprise stories decreased, the amount of time dedicated to enterprise stories increased – a finding which has methodological implications for future researchers.

Results indicate that economies of scale achieved through local television consolidation may translate to higher quality coverage in some content areas but not others. Implications for policy-makers are examined.

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CHAPTER 1:
Case In Point: Policy "Train Wreck" or Forward Locomotion?

It happened just before two o'clock on a wintry morning. A train traveling near Minot, North Dakota jumped the tracks, spilling a dangerous chemical from its punctured tanks. Liquid fertilizer poured onto the frozen ground, creating a serious health hazard for the people who lived nearby. About 37,000 people live in Minot. At the time of the accident, most were asleep. Emergency officials wanted to wake them up. It wasn't as easy as they hoped.

Anhydrous ammonia is a liquid fertilizer that turns to a gas when it makes contact with the air. At least three of the train's eighteen container cars were leaking (Witte, 2002). The vapor cloud was spreading. Emergency crews rushed to the scene to spray water on the leak, trying to stop the hemorrhaging. Meantime, police and fire officials tried to get the word out. First, they sounded air sirens (originally designed to warn residents about hazardous weather). Next, they tried to engage the town's Emergency Activation System - a system that allows authorities to link up with local broadcasters and get critical information out on the public airwaves. The system wasn't working properly, so officials started calling radio stations directly. Problem was, no one would pick up the phone.

Sirens woke up some residents. The sound of the crash woke up others. But for many, the wake-up call came in the form of noxious fumes seeping into their homes. They began having trouble breathing. Their eyes were watering; their skin burning.

They couldn't see more than a few feet in front of them. They knew something was seriously wrong. What they *didn't* know was: (1) what was causing it; and (2) what to do about it?

Citizens turned on their radios to find out what was happening. Were they in danger? Should they leave their homes or was it safer to stay put? Karel Sovak immediately started scanning local stations. Instead of emergency advice, he found music, commercials, and religious programming:

> … I was powerless. Information that was badly needed to make a decision was absent. I turned my back on the local sources that I felt should be there to help guide me, when all I got was a demonstrative fog, some notes that I have no memory of and someone talking about the Bible. (Sovak, 2002)

With fumes wafting through his house, Sovak made a command decision. He evacuated his family. As it turns out, it may have been safer to stay. Residents able to get through on crowded police lines were told to stay where they were. Instead of leaving their homes, 9-1-1 operators urged them to stuff wet towels under the doors to keep fumes out, run their showers to increase humidity, wrap damp rags around their heads, drink plenty of water, and wait for help to arrive. Lacking that critical information, however, Sovak and many of Minot's citizens decided to flee.

It took five hours for emergency crews to contain the spill. By the time it was over, one man who lived near the derailment site was dead and more than one hundred of his neighbors were hurt – mostly suffering from respiratory problems. Some of the victims described the vapors as being, "literally like breathing fire in" (Witte, 2002).

After the accident, many people in Minot, as well as politicians and media watchers across the country, started asking questions: What took authorities so long to alert citizens to the danger? Why weren't local radio stations serving the critical needs of their community by disseminating information and advice about the emergency instead of pre-programmed music? There is no one answer to those questions. Police say they couldn't get through to local radio and television stations because they had the wrong telephone numbers. Some broadcasters say they knew something had happened but couldn't get through to the police to confirm the story or find out how to advise their audience on the best course of action ("Emergency radio station," 2002; Eykyn et al., 2002).

There is another piece of the puzzle, however, on which lawmakers and media critics are now focusing. Although a public broadcasting station and a Christian station operated in town, at the time of the accident, all six of the town's commercial radio stations were owned by a single company (Lee, 2003). Clear Channel Communications owns more than 1,200 radio stations, broadcasting in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. While some of the Clear Channel stations in Minot had employees in the building (mostly maintenance personnel), on the night of the accident, all six stations were broadcasting music and news that, for the most part, was being programmed and piped in from other cities. Being nearly fully-automated, the stations didn't need employees in the building after regular business hours. According to Lowry Mays, Chairman and CEO of Clear Channel, as soon as station managers learned about the emergency, they brought in administrative and sales personnel to get the word out on the airwaves and help answer the calls coming in from local residents ("Media Ownership," 2002). Mays says additional engineers were also brought in from Minneapolis, some 500 miles away. Still, in the time it took to get critical information on the air, dozens of people suffered, perhaps unnecessarily.

Media Deregulation in Context

What happened in Minot puts into context the sorts of arguments being made for and against media deregulation in the United States – an issue gaining increasing attention across the country. Clearly, this was a worst-case scenario; an emergency with palpable consequences. A man died. Dozens of people were hurt. The question is: Did Clear Channel's virtual control of the radio market, a condition permitted under U.S. media policy, lead, at least in part, to delayed warnings in Minot. Is this story proof that media ownership consolidation, in and of itself, is bad for American society?

Some of Minot's residents are deeply concerned about the lack of information provided during the disaster. Marjorie Temanson was upset that it took so long to hear emergency advisories on the public airwaves:

> Like thousands of others, my husband and I tuned into television and radio stations that night, looking for acknowledgement of the incident and advisories about how to proceed, only to find nothing until close to 3:30 a.m., long after our home had been blanketed with the toxic cloud and our indoor air affected. (Temanson, 2002).

Temanson wonders whether the lack of information caused people in her community to place themselves in a more dangerous situation than they should have, especially those who chose to evacuate. A detective with the Minot Police Department wonders the same thing. Describing his family's flight from their home near the crash site, Lt. Steve Kukowski says he's angry he and his neighbors couldn't get the information they needed: "Had I known we could have survived in the house, we wouldn't have left. But in that instant, I knew we had to get out of there, and now" (Crites, 2002). Finding no information on the radio, and being unable to reach the police by phone, many in Minot believe they were left to save themselves (Rafferty, 2002).

Taking the lead from his constituents, one of North Dakota's key lawmakers has started asking questions about the media's role in the mishap. Senator Byron Dorgan is among the lawmakers currently waging a bi-partisan battle on Capitol Hill against the kind of media ownership concentration that, he believes, may have contributed to the confusion in Minot. Dorgan, a democrat, argues that American media policy, which allows ownership of public airwaves to be consolidated in the hands of a few, powerful media companies, puts his state's communities and constituents at risk ("Media Ownership," 2003). The concentration in radio ownership was made possible when Congress passed the Telecommunication Act of 1996. Among other things, the Act lifted the limits on the number of radio stations any one company could own across the country. It also significantly altered the number of stations one company could own within individual communities.

Lawmakers like Dorgan are becoming increasingly concerned about recent efforts to allow similar changes in television and print media. In a Senate committee hearing on the subject, Dorgan asked:

> What will we see with respect to television? Will we see similar galloping concentration that has already existed? Where do you think this stops, and where do you (think) there ought to be legitimate concern about those of us who care about free markets and the market system and competition? ("Media Ownership," 2003)

Those like Dorgan, fighting against further deregulation in the broadcast media, suggest consolidation of ownership is to blame for the media's inattention to matters of public interest as well as declining quality standards overall. They argue that, left to their own devices, absent government oversight and regulation, media companies in America's capitalist system are most likely to choose profits over serving the public interest.

Conflicting Opinions

Did media policy jump the tracks along with that train in Minot? Some say yes. There are others, however, who think differently about the disaster. They wonder: What would have happened if the stations were owned by people who lived in town? Would a so-called "mom and pop" station have been more likely than corporate entities to employ workers overnight or get warnings out earlier? If multiple owners were competing against Clear Channel in the market, might each of them have had a different coverage plan or mission statement– with different schedules for staff and different ideas about how to serve the community's interests?

When we hear anecdotal evidence like the story in Minot, we almost always hear about something bad. Contrary to the critics' point of view, supporters of ownership deregulation argue that many *good* things come of corporate ownership and consolidation. For example, by owning multiple stations within cities and across media markets, many supporters believe corporations can better serve a community's interests by producing more diverse programming. They contend that, without their vast resources, smaller companies and locally-owned stations are often less likely to afford the costs of producing new formats or programs. In short, diverse programming might not make it on the air. By combining resources, they believe they're able to do a better job than locally-owned stations or those run by smaller ownership groups, providing higher-quality products and more expansive options for listeners.

That is exactly the argument Clear Channel Communication's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer made when he defended his company's actions before the U.S. Senate. During hearings on media deregulation in Washington, Lowry Mays called Minot:

> … a perfect case for deregulation, because when we bought those stations from the previous owner there were three formats in Minot. There were two country stations. There were two adult contemporary stations. There was a news talk station and a station that simulcast one of the country stations. Today there's a classic rock station. There's a country station. There's a hits station. There's an adult contemporary station. There's an oldies station and there's a news talk station; much, much more diversity in Minot than prior to deregulation. ("Media Ownership," 2003)

Mays argues that format diversity is proof his company is doing good things for individual communities and for the country.

Supporters of deregulation argue the media, like any other business, will reach its fullest potential when free market conditions reign. By competing against each other, media companies are forced to produce "products" that serve the needs of their audience. If they don't, they will likely perish. They say, if a station produces programming that fails to serve the needs of listeners or viewers, most likely, the audience will turn to another station. In short, when it comes to their own best interests, viewers will likely vote with their remote.

For those who defend the need for ownership deregulation, Minot represents an unfortunate series of events which has little, if anything to do with corporate consolidation. For critics, it is an exemplar of the "train wreck" that is media ownership policy in the United States ("Media Ownership," 2003). The facts of the case (and others like it) are currently being discussed and debated among lawmakers, legal experts, scholars, media watchers, and members of the public, many of whom are concerned about the effects of changing U.S. broadcast rules and regulations on society. The issues are especially critical now, as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) seeks to redefine media ownership policy for the future – not just in radio, but in broadcast television, cable, and print media as well.

Momentary Return to Minot

A brief return to Minot, North Dakota helps demonstrate what's at stake and the different points of view under consideration. Many residents blame media consolidation for the lack of vital, local information they received that night. They claim they received significantly more, and better quality news before Clear Channel took over. Fred Debowey, Minot's Police Chief, says: "we seldom hear local news anymore" (Lee, 2003). What news residents do get often comes from national and regional syndicated wire services. According a New York Times report, "Clear Channel now has only one full-time news employee, who is often heard reading statewide and national wire service dispatches. Local reporters feign shock when they see him at news conferences" (Lee). Ken Crites is a former radio reporter who now works for the town's local newspaper. He says, "I get up in the morning and it's a disc jockey reading (Associated Press) copy…. The Canadians could come over the border, and we would never know it" (Lee).

Citing the Minot case as a "notorious" example of media concentration, an organization called the Center for Public Integrity released a study in October of 2003 about U.S. media ownership concentration. Researchers found small and medium-sized media markets, like Minot, are most at risk for concentration of ownership in the radio industry (Dunbar & Pilhofer, 2003). The survey shows, in 43 different metropolitan areas across the nation, a single company owns at least a third of all stations. In most other American cities, oligopolistic conditions reign, with only a very few number of companies controlling the market.

Without a doubt, Clear Channel, Inc. holds more power in these markets than any other company. They are a leviathan in local radio programming. When it comes to serving the public interest, however, the company's top executive does not see news and information as a critical responsibility. During an interview in *Fortune* magazine, CEO Lowry Mays said:

> If anyone said we were in the radio business, it wouldn't be someone from our company…. We're not in the business of providing news and information. We're not in the business of providing well-researched music. We're simply in the business of selling our customers products. (Chen, 2003)

It is just this sort of response that disturbs those who depend on and value the role that local broadcasters play in their respective communities – especially when it comes to the dissemination of news and information.

Nearly two years after it happened, the emergency in Minot is getting fresh attention in the press and on Capitol Hill. It has become a familiar rallying point for those fighting continued ownership consolidation in the U.S. Of concern is whether Americans across the country might experience similar troubles in their communities when and if ownership deregulation shifts from radio to television.

Certainly, the conditions in Minot had palpable consequences. People's lives were at risk, someone was killed. But is this, in fact, a worst-case scenario for media deregulation? Certainly, such anecdotal evidence is important to collect and discuss in the process of policy formulation. Such examples make it easy to see why the issue is critical. But what about those consequences that are harder to see, and to study?

CHAPTER 2:
Introduction: A Battle over American Broadcasting

Media policy is at a pivotal juncture in the United States – a juncture that could send news and entertainment programming down two, very different roads. The outcome of this debate has serious implications for the future of the mass media and democracy in this country, yet few Americans know what's going on. According to a recent poll by The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 89% of the U.S. population knows little or nothing about critical policy decisions being made right now in Washington ("Strong Opposition," 2003). The decisions involve how to regulate (or deregulate) U.S. media ownership in a way that preserves and protects the public's best interests.

While few Americans are aware of these critical policy decisions, the Pew study shows, as awareness increases, so does opposition to the proposed changes. But is ownership consolidation good or bad for the American public? Does it lead to greater competition, diversity, and localism, thereby serving the public interest? Or does this type of deregulation put the democratic process at risk by limiting the diversity of views and negatively affecting the quality of programming on the public airwaves?

This study contributes to the conversation and scholarly debate on the subject by focusing on the impact of deregulation on local television news. Local television is the leading source of news and information for most Americans (Nielsen Media Research, 2002). By studying the evolution of news content over time in a single city affected by ownership consolidation, this research is designed to provide insights into the specific effects of deregulation on news in the United States – information potentially useful to lawmakers, regulators, policy experts, and the public.

Media Deregulation: Two Competing Views

In the summer of 2003, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ruled to substantially change the country's broadcast ownership laws. There are six laws in all. Each, in its own way, places limits on the number (and kind) of media outlets any one company can own in the United States. The regulations are designed to protect the public interest. Underlying the rules are two key concepts: (1) Broadcast airwaves serve as a modern-day town hall, a place where citizens can go to find out about issues that affect their communities; and (2) Americans can make the best decisions about their communities and their futures when they see and hear a variety of opinions and perspectives. This is especially true when it comes to news and public affairs programming. Historically, U.S. media policy has placed limits on the number of media outlets any one company can own, expecting that, through such policies, the diversity of viewpoints on America's public airwaves would be ensured and the democratic process protected.

At issue is whether these ownership rules, some of them on the books since the early 1940s, are still necessary in a modern media environment. Based originally on the concept of scarcity, many of the broadcast regulations were put in place because a limited number of broadcast "channels" were available. To keep radio and television airwaves diverse (and broadcast signals from interfering with each other), the government needed to control access. Companies would be constrained in the number of broadcast outlets they could own which, in turn, theoretically, promoted competition in the "marketplace of ideas." Only owners with a demonstrated commitment to public interests would be allowed to hold and maintain a broadcast license.

The public airwaves are no less scarce today than they were in the 1940s. In the 21st century, however, Americans have a much larger array of choices for news, public affairs, and entertainment programming, thanks in large part to new and developing technologies. Through cable, satellite, video recorders, and computers, the public has witnessed an explosion in the number of mass media outlets, sources and resources. As a result, some people argue the concept of scarcity no longer applies and that government regulation of ownership of the public airwaves is no longer necessary.

Supporters of this "free market" approach to broadcasting contend that, in a capitalist society, competitive markets work naturally to produce different, diverse products. Competition leads to innovation, lower prices, and improved services. They contend that businesses, unfettered by government regulations, are best suited to determine what the public wants and needs, largely because their financial well-being depends on it. They argue that the government, by placing limits on ownership, puts broadcasters at a distinct, competitive disadvantage with non-broadcast media providers such as cable and direct broadcast services – a disadvantage that will lead to their financial extinction and, ultimately, hurt the American public by limiting programming choices.

Competing with this view is the idea that a true marketplace of ideas cannot be achieved in a "laisez faire" economic environment. People with this perspective often disagree with the contention that, left to their own devices, media companies will necessarily craft "products" in the best interests of Americans. Instead, they argue that the financial interests of those companies take primacy, leading to bland, cheap, low-qualty programming that only targets demographically -valuable groups. The interests of the whole American public, old and young, rich and poor, male and female, white and black, straight and gay, they argue, will loose out to the interests of corporate stockholders and advertisers – the so-called "paymasters" of broadcast media.

Many supporters of this view believe that media policy in the United States has been hijacked by big business seeking to profit from the American public, corporations which use valuable public resources (the airwaves) to further consolidate their holdings. Deregulatory trends in media ownership policy, they argue, ultimately decrease the range of competing voices by forcing out smaller, less consolidated, more local competitors. Commercial considerations are winning out over the public's needs. To them, existing laws don't go far enough to protect the dissemination of diverse opinions over the publicly-owned airwaves. Not only should deregulation be halted, many believe broadcast ownership rules need further tightening.

Who Decides and How?

Charged with the unenviable task of balancing these competing views, and crafting American media policy for the future, sits the FCC. The central question before the commission is: How, in today's media world, are Americans' best interests protected? It appears the commission has come down on the side of commerce.

On June 2, 2003, the FCC released its much-anticipated ruling on media ownership in the United States ("FCC sets limits," 2003). After more than twenty months of consideration, the commission significantly changed the regulatory landscape, allowing increased consolidation of broadcast media ownership across the country and within individual communities. The changes will be discussed in detail later. Generally, however, the FCC:

(1) Raised the so-called **national cap**, allowing one entity to own local television stations that collectively reach up to 45 percent of the U.S. television audience. The previous limit was 35 percent.

(2) Lifted the ban that prevented one company from owning both a television station and newspaper within the same city. The **cross-ownership** rule had been in place since 1975.

(3) Expanded the number of television stations one company can own within a "market." The new rules allow **duopolies**, and in some cases triopolies, in dozens of American cities.

Not all its decisions were deregulatory in nature. The FCC kept intact a rule which banned one company owning more than one of the top four major broadcast networks. The commission also tightened some radio ownership rules by redefining what constitutes a radio "market." This decision to re-regulate radio ownership was driven largely by concerns about rampant consolidation in the radio industry following the loosening of ownership rules in 1996 – rules which are strikingly similar to the television deregulation currently under consideration.

The FCC's new rules ease ownership rules in television, radio, and newspapers and allow for increased consolidation. Despite this fact, ironically, the FCC promotes its changes as placing "new limits" on ownership concentration ("FCC Sets Limits," 2003). The FCC concludes the new regulations are carefully balanced to protect diversity, localism, and competition in the American media system – the three-pronged test for public interest. The commission argues it is protecting the public's interests by ensuring "pro-competitive market structures":

> …. these new broadcast ownership limits will foster a vibrant marketplace of ideas, promote vigorous competition, and ensure that broadcasters continue to serve the needs and interests of their local communities." ("FCC Sets Limits," p. 1).

The decision to further deregulate America's media system was not unanimous, however. The changes were approved in a tight, 3-to-2 vote which fell along party lines: Republicans in favor, Democrats against. According to media reports after the ruling, "both sides claimed they were voting in the public interest and for free speech" (Ahrens, 2003b).

Political & Judicial Fall-Out

The FCC's policy decisions are stirring considerable debate, not only between FCC commissioners, but also in Congress, the courts, among journalists, media scholars, and the American public. Originally scheduled to go into effect on September 4, 2003, the new rules are now on hold. The first policy roadblock came from a federal appeals court. Finding in favor of a coalition of media access groups, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals issued an emergency stay the same day the rules were scheduled to go into effect, temporarily delaying their implementation. Specifically, the case involved the FCC's decision to lift the cross-ownership ban (for newspapers and television stations). An anti-deregulation group called the Prometheus Radio Project argued that the revised ownership regulations could do irreparable harm to local programming. Although not convinced that would be the case, the court decided it would be better to hold off on implementing the rules than try to undo damage they might cause should they later be declared invalid (Ahrens, 2003a). In June of 2004, the court officially ruled in favor of Prometheus, sending the FCC back to the drawing board to rework several of the newly-revised rules and regulations (Ahrens, 2004a; Labaton, 2004b; Lazaroff & Miller, 2004).

The courts aren't the only ones getting involved. Immediately after the FCC passed released its new rules, a political showdown began shaping up on Capitol Hill (Phillips, 2003). House lawmakers voted overwhelmingly, 400-to-21, to overturn the FCC's decision on national ownership limits. The measure was attached to a spending bill that provided funding for several government agencies. More recently, in June of 2004, the Senate voted to repeal the FCC's rules and restore the tougher restrictions (Eggerton, 2004a: Labaton, 2004a). Despite bi-partisan concern about the FCC's deregulatory moves, the White House has promised to veto any legislative effort to overturn the commission's decision (Labaton, 2004a).

The future of the FCC's media ownership rules is decidedly unclear. Responding to the political fallout, FCC Chairman Michael Powell staunchly defended the commission's decisions. Powell argues the commission, after hearing public comments and holding a public hearing on the matter, "created enforceable rules that reflect the realities of today's media marketplace…. The FCC based its judgments on evidence that the new rules would benefit Americans" (Phillips).

What's Missing and What's at Stake?

If allowed to go into effect, will the new rules benefit Americans? How will increased consolidation of ownership in television affect the content (and quality) of programming? Will economies of scale achieved through consolidation lead to higher quality and more diverse programming options? Will individual citizens, communities, and the democratic process be helped or hurt as the market model of media ownership takes hold? These questions are at the core of the media deregulation debate. They are, however, extremely difficult to answer. Few researchers have directly examined the impact of media consolidation on content.

When it ruled on broadcast ownership in 2003, the FCC relied primarily on twelve empirical studies commissioned specifically for the regulatory review process ("FCC releases," 2002). The studies, however, largely failed to collect the kind of empirical evidence that would allow policy experts and media scholars to better understand and address the issue (Smith, 2003). Despite the often-theorized (and occasionally-demonstrated) links between ownership and content production, few of the FCC's studies examined actual media-produced content. Some focused on the impact of radio deregulation on formats and song play lists. Most, however, examined diversity, localism, and competition by counting the number of outlets and/or available program choices or creating mathematical models.

Despite deregulation's potential impact on news and information programming, only three of the FCC's studies touched on the correlation between ownership and news content. (Details about these studies and their methodological approaches are discussed in Chapter 4, along with other studies which address news quality and consolidation issues). Two of the studies failed to include any actual stories or newscasts (Spavins, Roberts, & Frenette, 2002; Waldfogel, 2002). A third, conducted by Pritchard (2002), examined the correlations between editorial and news story "slant" and corporate ownership. The findings had considerable implications for the FCC's decision on cross-ownership. The study's design, however, had significant methodological flaws (Smith, 2003).

The FCC appears, then, to be voting in favor of ownership deregulations without sufficiently investigating the actual impact on content. The potential costs of making a mistake with the future of American broadcast policy cannot be underestimated. This is especially true when it comes to regulations that affect the production and dissemination of messages from local television stations – America's leading source of news and information (Nielsen, 2002). In a recent survey of media consumers, Nielsen Media Research found 92% of Americans have tuned in to local news in the past week to collect information. That's more than newspapers (79%), radio (68%), the Internet (34%) or magazines (20%)(Nielsen, 2002). With the critical role local news programming plays in the ability of citizens to conduct the business of democracy, researchers need to collect more direct evidence and provide the FCC with the empirical evidence it needs to make more informed decisions.

News Quality & Consolidation: Empirical Evidence from a Single City

This researcher hopes to contribute to the policy and scholarly discussion by examining the correlations between ownership consolidation and the quality of local television news. Recent debates on the subject of consolidation have focused primarily on national ownership limits and the cross-ownership of television and newspapers. While both of these regulations have significant implications for local communities, a third deregulatory decision has gone virtually unnoticed and un-addressed by lawmakers, regulators and researchers. The present study focuses on the impact of duopolies – an issue which has received little critical attention.

Duopolies are conditions in which one company is allowed to own two television stations in the same city, or media "market." Under previous regulations, media companies were limited to owning a single station within a single city. In 1999, however, an FCC rule change allowed companies to own two stations under certain, limited conditions ("Report and Order," 1999). Companies could buy a competing station in the same market if: (1) the station being purchased was not within the top four in market "share"; and (2) at least eight independent, broadcast voices (or owners) remained in the market after the purchase was complete. The FCC's rule changed cleared the way for the creation of duopolies in more than thirty communities across the United States.

The FCC further relaxed those standards in its most recent ownership ruling. Until now, *only* broadcast owners were considered in the duopoly decision. New regulations change the way that "eight voices" are defined, allowing newspapers, radio stations, and cable outlets to be included in the equation. The revised standards make room for duopolies in 72 of the nation's 210 media markets, and triopolies (three-station combinations) in a handful of large markets (McConnell, 2003). Because the new regulations are temporarily on hold, now is a critical time to address the impact of such consolidation in local markets, before more such acquisitions are allowed.

Gannett Co., Incorporated was one of the first U.S. media companies to take advantage of the FCC's revised duopoly rules. On November 16, 1999, the company announced plans to purchase an ABC affiliate in Jacksonville, Florida. Under normal conditions, such an acquisition might make for a few inches of copy in the local paper's business section. In this case, however, the announcement made headlines. Gannett already owned the NBC affiliate in the same market (WTLV). On March 1, 2000, it gained ownership of the ABC affiliate (WJXX) as well.

Gannett's acquisition of WJXX is a prime example of media consolidation which has so notably impacted the broadcast industry in recent years. In a news release describing the deal, Gannett administrators were proud to point out it now owns 22 television stations reaching 17.4 percent of the U.S. television markets. Regarding the company's current ownership of WTLV and the impending purchase of WJXX, Cecil Walker, President and CEO of Gannett Broadcasting, called the purchase "a new strategic opportunity for us to build a stronger 'First Coast News' operation to better serve the viewers" (Gannett, 1999).

The question remains, however, whether this acquisition has, in fact, served the best interests of Jacksonville's television news viewers. While network programming remained "as is" on both channels, shortly after acquiring WJXX, Gannett consolidated the news departments from both stations into a single newsgathering operation, simulcasting "First Coast News" on both stations. The sales staff was left intact. The news operation at WJXX, however, was systematically dismantled, with a very small number of newsroom employees moving to the new organization. In short, the Jacksonville market lost dozens of diverse journalistic voices. Critics argue such duopoly conditions inevitably reduce the diversity (and quality) of programming in local markets. In contrast, supporters suggest the economies of scale achieved through the acquisition will result in an improved news product. To date, however, no one has gathered empirical evidence to support either position.

This is a longitudinal case study, examining newscasts in a single city before and after consolidation. It identifies connections between ownership consolidation (duopolies) and the quality of local news content. When it comes to local news, quality content can sometimes be hard to find and even harder to quantify. Unlike the FCC's research into local news quality, which utilized *implied* measures of quality, including time devoted to news, ratings and awards (Spavins et al., 2002), this author sought to identify ways in which changing ownership conditions can affect specific elements of newscasts within individual stations and individual media markets.

Quality measures employed in this study were guided primarily by theoretical research as well as legal and policy documents addressing public interest ideals. By using the public airwaves to ply their trade, broadcast media are required to serve the public's best interest – interests historically defined through the concepts of diversity and localism. This dissertation sought to quantify and empirically measure those concepts.

Key Practical Questions

In summary, this project brings two practical issues into relief; one involving media policy, the other media scholarship. The researcher wonders: How should the FCC and/or lawmakers proceed with media ownership rules if it is unclear how those changes affect the content of local newscasts and the resulting impact on people's lives? Should the FCC reverse, change, modify, push forward with new policies which allow increased consolidation? This study also addresses a key methodological problem for media scholars: How can researchers judge local news quality, using empirical measures, so that the resulting data is useful to the policy process? At this critical moment in U.S. media history, it is vital that scholars step in to fill the research gaps. This study attempts to produce useful information on both fronts.

CHAPTER 3:
Public Interest Standards, Competing Models & Political Economy

The goal of this study is to examine the ways in which media ownership policy in the United States in general, and consolidation in particular, impacts the content of local television news. The issue is significant because of the monumental role the media play in American society.

Democracy is a form of self-government – a system of majority rule with fundamental protections for minority citizens and minority views (Altschull, 1995). The assumption is that democracy is nurtured when an informed citizenry makes wise judgments in choosing their government representatives. According to McChesney, in order for the system to function properly, two things must happen. First, the government must be able to communicate to its citizens. Second, and perhaps more importantly, citizens must have access to information that will help them carry out their democratic responsibilities. In large, complex societies, an effective system of political communication is one of three key criteria for a functioning democratic system of self-governance (McChesney, 1997, p. 5).[1]

Enter the media. For decades, great minds have debated and discussed its power in the democratic process. From Milton in Colonial times, to Lippmann (1922) and Dewey (1927) in the 1920s, to McChesney (1997) and Bagdikian (1997) in the modern

[1] According to McChesney, parity in economic wealth and property ownership and a sense of community and individual well-being are also central.

era, there is little doubt of the influential role that the media can play in society. That power goes far beyond pure politics. The media are also conduits through which information about other large social, economic, and cultural institutions is shared. At its most basic level, they shape what we know and understand about society. They are where we get both "the pictures in our heads" (Lippmann, p. 3) and our "pictures of the world" (Bagdikian, p. x).

In the modern information age, that world (or at least our access to information about it) seems to grow larger every day. Technology and social change have led us into a global society where information has a shorter shelf-life than ever before (McManus, 1994). As communities expand, grow, and shift – both geographically and socially – the public becomes increasingly disconnected from the "town square" of the past. The media, then, become the primary purveyors of news and information.

By selectively producing both entertainment and news content, the media tell Americans what is important and how to prioritize that information. As agenda-setters, they may not tell us *what* to think but they do tell us what to think *about* (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). According to Smythe (1981), whether implicitly or explicitly, the media use their time and resources to attend to issues according to some ordering of priorities:

> Every institution has an agenda which gives priorities to the problems it faces and the actions it might take. What is left off the agenda gets little or no attention and just what gets on the agenda and in what form determines our collective definitions of reality – and of what is possible, what impossible of accomplishment. (p. 7)

Smythe argues that the agenda-setting function is, ultimately, "a collective rather than an individual process" – a process which begins with birth and ends at death (p. 1). To Bagdikian, the issue is not simply about resources, or time, but also about raw power:

> At issue is the possession of power to surround almost every man, woman, and child in the country with controlled images and words, to socialize each new generation of Americans, to alter the political agenda of the country. And with that power comes the ability to exert influence that in many ways is greater than that of schools, religion, parents, and even government itself (Bagdikian p. ix).

While the media may legitimate existing power structures in society, Gans (2003) believes the media also contribute to social continuity, especially media that produce news and information programming: "News is like the sun; its daily appearance as scheduled is a sign that social life will go on as before" (p. 71).

Media Responsibility & the Democratic Assumption

Known as the Fourth Estate, the news media are responsible for watching over powerful forces in society. Because of their potential to further the ends of democracy, the founding fathers deemed it necessary to protect the press from governmental interference. In fact, the "press" is the only business in the United States to have express protection under the Constitution.

As the First Amendment makes clear, "Congress shall make no law … abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." The dominant metaphor currently underlying the First Amendment and the value of free speech is the *marketplace of ideas*. According to

Franklin and Anderson (1990), one of its earliest expressions came in 1644 in John Milton's *Areopagitica* in an essay against the English system of licensing publications:

> And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously…to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?

A more modern expression of the marketplace metaphor can be attributed to John Stuart Mill as a reason for denying all government power to suppress speech (Franklin & Anderson, p. 36).

The concept of the "marketplace of ideas" first made its way into American media jurisprudence in 1945. In *Associated Press v. United States,* the Supreme Court of the United States concluded that the press play a special role in the democratic system. In his often-quoted opinion for the majority, Justice Black ruled that the First Amendment "rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public." As such, the high court found that the media was not like any other business. With special protections came particular responsibilities that trump other considerations, including economic ones. Justice Frankfurter concurred: "The business of the press … is the promotion of truth regarding public matters by furnishing the basis for an understanding of them. Truth and understanding are not wares like peanuts and potatoes" (*AP v. US*, p. 17).

The previous case involved the Associated Press, which is a print organization. Before moving forward, it is critical to make a distinction between "the press" in general, and the broadcast media in particular. Print and broadcast media are both considered to be members of the press for Constitutional purposes but there are differences between the two. With few exceptions, in the United States, the government cannot legally regulate content produced by the print media. Broadcast operators, however, are held to a higher standard of responsibility. Unlike the print media, broadcasters rely on the electromagnetic spectrum to transmit their messages. Because room on the spectrum is limited and considered to be a natural resource belonging to the American public, its use comes with philosophical and political strings attached.

Radio and television operators use the public airwaves to ply their trade. As a result, their ownership structure and content production can be regulated. In *Red Lion Broadcasting v. FCC* (1969), the Supreme Court ruled that, due to the unique nature of electronic speech, its immediacy and its power, the government could indeed regulate the airwaves without violating broadcasters' First Amendment rights. In the opinion of Justice White, the government could also require broadcasters to balance their own commercial and economic interests with the rights of the public:

> It is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail, rather than to countenance the monopolization of that market, whether it be by the government itself or a private licensee. Furthermore, … the public has a right to receive suitable access to political, aesthetic, moral and other ideas and experiences which is crucial (to the issue at hand) and cannot be constitutionally abridged. (Red Lion, pp. 386-390)

In short, the high court found the public was entitled to have broadcast media that worked in its best interests. Red Lion still stands today. It has been invoked on a number of occasions, including in *FCC v. National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting* (1978) and again more recently in *Sinclair v. FCC and the United States of America* (2002).

What Is Broadcasting in the Public Interest?

If the broadcast media are expected to serve the public's best interests, how should those interests be defined? In other words, what does the "public interest" actually mean? The answer is not simple. The government has never explicitly defined the term and so its meaning has, historically, been contested, dynamic, and vague. While perhaps indefinable, one can come to an understanding of the concept by examining the ways in which lawmakers and jurists have historically addressed it.

Many media scholars and legal experts track the evolution of public interest standards to a seminal act by Congress in the early 1920s (Brock, 1994; Cooper, 2003; Croteau & Hoynes, 2001; Franklin & Anderson, 1990; Fratkin, 2004, Horowitz, 1989, and Middleton, Lee, & Chamberlin, 2003). At that time in American history, the airwaves were jammed with radio operators whose signals regularly interfered with one another. Hoping to corral those who were using the electronic spectrum, Congress passed The Radio Act of 1927. With strong support from the commercial radio networks, the Act established the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) and gave it authority to control access to the airwaves. The Radio Act went beyond managing the spectrum, however. Its wording led directly to a "public trustee" model of broadcasting (Fowler & Brenner, 1981).

The Radio Act of 1927 contained a provision that broadcasters held their licenses in the "public interest, convenience, or necessity." The Act presupposed that broadcasting was not another commodity that should operate in an unfettered marketplace but that, by regulating the industry, the public interest would be protected. Broadcast licensees were entrusted with a piece of the public domain, and were to act as fiduciaries on behalf of the public – as proxies for those who did not have access to the airwaves (Horowitz, 1989, p. 120). The basic provisions set forth in the Radio Act were further expanded and codified by Congress in the Communication Act of 1934. This Act created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and gave it the power to set standards for the licensing of radio and television broadcasting in the United States. The standards would involve both technological, structural (ownership), and content-based requirements that served the "public interest, convenience, or necessity."

Congress, the FCC, and the Courts have since proffered countless pieces of legislation, rules and regulations, and legal opinions which have bearing on the concept of public interest. According to Epstein, the concept of the public interest which has ultimately emerged rests on three central assumptions about the role of a communications medium in a free society (Epstein, 2000, p. 48):

1) According to the FCC, the basic purpose of broadcasting is "the development of an informed public opinion through the public dissemination of news and ideas concerning the vital public issues of the day";

2) It is absolutely "essential to the welfare of the public" for these ideas and information to come from diverse and antagonistic sources" This presupposes that "right conclusions" are more likely to be arrived at by a "multitude of tongues" competing for the public's attention than from any single authoritative source. The notion that truth is produced and tested by the unrestrained competition between news sources, if accepted, makes rational the First Amendment protection of a free, unrestrained press.

3) Broadcasting must function preeminently as a local institution. Since it is presumed that the informational needs of different localities may be different, licenses must ascertain and attend to the local needs. The Federal Radio commission established this principle as early as1928, holding that "a

> broadcasting station may be regarded as a sort of mouthpiece on the air for the community it serves, over which its public events of general interest, its political campaigns, its election results, its athletic contests, it s orchestras and artists, and discussion of public issues may be broadcast."

Because individuals cannot broadcast on the airwaves themselves, Epstein clarifies that "Individual broadcasters are assumed to be the market*place* itself (original italics), or a public forum in which different parties, representing different views, can be heard by the public" (Epstein, p. 64). Therefore, diversity and localism are both central to the concepts attached to broadcasting in the public interest.

Concepts of Diversity

Based on John Stuart Mill and other liberal theorists, the public trustee model stems from the concept that a free marketplace of ideas will ultimately produce the right conclusions. The public, it is believed, can best judge the political and social environment when exposed to a well-rounded view of different perspectives and opinions from a variety of sources. As noted earlier, the high court first recognized this view in the *Associated Press v. United States* (1945) when it ruled that "the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public."

According to Napoli (2001), diversity, as a policy objective, has historically been defined in three distinct ways. First, there is "Source Diversity." Through a variety of owners and a diverse workforce, different media content will be produced. Second, there is "Content Diversity." Through different format and program types, a variety of ideas and opinions will emerge. Last, Napoli addresses "Exposure Diversity," which refers to the diversity of content or sources which will be consumed by audience members according to their individual needs and interests.[2]

The FCC has little direct impact on the choices citizens make about the media they consume. The Commission *does*, however, have the legal authority to regulate the structure and content of the industry. In general, the FCC has regulated the structure of the industry by determining: (1) who is allowed to hold a broadcast license; and (2) how many outlets they are allowed to own. The traditional assumption by theorists and regulators has been that "source diversity" will promote "content diversity." Throughout the years, however, the FCC has also expressly regulated the content of the industry.

A detailed discussion of the rules and regulations affecting the structure of ownership, so-called "source diversity," will follow later. At present, however, a brief examination of content rules promulgated (and repealed) by the FCC will point to the ways in which federal regulators have conceptualized diversity as a public interest goal. The following discussion borrows heavily from Horowitz's book, *The Irony of Regulatory Reform: The Deregulation of American Telecommunications* (1989). According to Horowitz, the FCC has taken two basic approaches to content regulation. It has restricted certain kinds of content that it deems harmful or inappropriate (such as

[2] Cooper (2003) takes a slightly different approach to the modeling of diversity as a policy pursuit. Whereas Napoli would have us examine the diversity in "exposure" from the audience perspective, Cooper prefers the concept of "institutional diversity," which reflects the special expertise and culture of different media. No matter how the question of diversity is discussed, however, according to Cooper, the goal of having an informed citizenry is inherently qualitative and complex (p. 63).

violent or obscene material). Second, it has required certain kinds of content in hopes of serving the civic needs. The majority of content requirements are now obsolete. However, they demonstrate the central role diversity has played, historically, in the public interest standards of broadcasting.

Equal Time: Congress first addressed the ideals of "content" diversity in Section 315 of the Communications Act of 1934. This section of the Act involves Equal Time provisions to candidates running for a public office. It required that stations providing air time to a candidate for public office provide equal time to opposing candidates. The requirement made an exception for candidates' appearance on news programs. Ideally, the public would be served by hearing differing political views and platforms.

Fairness Doctrine: Established in 1949, the Fairness Doctrine required broadcasters to devote a "reasonable" amount of time to the discussion of community issues and required that "such programs be designed so that the public has a reasonable opportunity to hear different opposing positions on the public issues of interest and importance in the community." The doctrine did not require broadcasters to provide "equal" amounts of time, but it did require that some time be dedicated to opposing views. The FCC repealed the doctrine in 1987, arguing it was no longer needed and actually interfered with diversity by limiting controversial subject matter that a station might air.

Programming Types: In 1960, the FCC released a policy statement listing different types of programs it deemed to serve a diversity of public interests. There were 14, including: news, programs for children, religious programs, educational programs, political programs, public affairs programs, and agricultural programs. Stations were required to dedicate a minimum of 5% of their broadcast time to public affairs programming, whatever the type.[3] Today, the 5% minimum standard of public affairs programming is gone. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 does require, however, that stations produce a minimum of three hours per week of "legitimate, educational television."

Ascertainment: In 1974, the FCC began requiring stations to file annual reports detailing the amount of news, public affairs, and local programming they aired. This was the so-called "ascertainment" process, whereby stations were required to ascertain (from local community groups, leaders and other research tools) the diversity of issues and topics that affected their local communities. Once the needs were determined, stations were required to address those needs through programming content, keep a written record of the process, and keep those records in publicly-available file. Again, the information could be reviewed by the FCC when the station's license came up for renewal. The FCC eliminated formal ascertainment requirements in 1981 and reduced record-keeping requirements in 1984. Stations are now required only to contact "all significant segments of the community" about problems and issues facing their service areas and produce a list each quarter that describes five to ten community issues they covered during the year (with brief descriptions of how they treated the issues)(See FCC 1984). While they are

[3] While the FCC has never had formal minimum quotas for the amount of *news*, according to Epstein (2000), at one time, FCC staffers did employ certain "magic numbers" when they were processing stations' applications for license renewal. If followed, those magic numbers would likely lead to automatic renewals (p. 6). Communications lawyer W. Theodore Pierson, who represented many stations in their dealings with the FCC, explained that Washington attorneys would find out in their day-to-day communications with FCC staff members what the magic number was and then produce that amount of news content. According to Epstein, in 1969, it was 5 percent news and 1 percent public affairs programs.

still required to create programming that responds to the diversity of issues of concern to the public but they now have much more flexibility in determining nature of that response (*Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ v. FCC*, 1988).

Throughout the years, Congress, the Federal Communications Commission and the Courts have made explicit their desires for diverse programming content through a variety of content rules and regulations. Most content requirements no longer exist today. While they have been eliminated or substantially altered, many of these rules, especially ascertainment, also point directly at the concepts of localism embedded in broadcasting's public interest metaphor.

Concepts of Localism

The function of localism as a communication policy objective is directly related to enhanced political participation and better informed decision making (Napoli, 2001). The distribution of government control in an American democracy is, by design, primarily local. As both Bagdikian (1997) and Altchull (1995) explain, the nature of U.S. self-governance in our local communities creates a need for intense attention to local lived realities.

The critical nature of local communities has had a profound effect on U.S. media policy. Individual broadcasters may be affiliated with national networks (such as NBC, FOX, or NPR) but broadcast stations are licensed to operate in specific, local communities. The Communications Act of 1934 requires that these stations, to keep their licenses, create and air programming that meets the needs of communities they serve. In *Pinellas Broadcasting Co. v. FCC* (1956), the Supreme Court ruled that Section 307(b) of the Act covers not only the reception of an adequate signal "but also community needs for programs of local interest and importance and for organs of self expression." The key element in broadcast regulation, the high court ruled, was the "presentation of programs of local interest and importance."

The Courts aren't the only ones to laud the benefits of localism. According to Cooper (2003), Congress has long recognized that "local decisions like school board elections, policing, zoning, refuse collection, and fire and rescue deeply affect the quality of life and need to be aired in the media to have an informed democratic debate" (p. 27). Congressional elections, he points out, are also local affairs that receive little detailed attention in the national media. Therefore, broadcasters' most direct commitments must be to covering local communities.

In 1946, the FCC attempted to codify broadcaster's public service responsibilities to their local communities in *Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licenses*. Called the Blue Book, the Commission said it would favor license renewals for stations that ran locally-produced programs, and news and programming featuring the discussion of local issues without regard to cost (FCC, 1946, p. 198). The FCC considered news and public affairs programming to be among the most important program types that served the public interest. In 1960, the FCC issued another policy statement saying that programs which involved local self-expression and used local talent were critical. In that same policy statement, the FCC said localism "consists of a diligent, positive, and continuing effort by the licensee to discover and fulfill the tastes, needs and desires of his service area. If he has accomplished this, he has met this public responsibility" (FCC 1960).[4]

Creating Content in the Public Interest: Two Competing Models

Again, no specific definition exists for the public interest. It is a simultaneously bold but vague vision. Localism and diversity clearly play a role. Less clear, however, is the path government regulators should take in attempting to facilitate such opaque public interest goals.

Communications industries play a dual role in society. First and foremost, they are commercial endeavors. If they cannot make money, they cannot stay in business. Their business practices, however, can have a profound affect on civic discourse and community engagement (Altschull, 1995; Dewey, 1927; Entman, 1989; Lippman, 1922; McChesney, 1999; Patterson, 1994; Patterson, 2002 Putnam, 2000). In the words of noted media scholar Wilbur Schramm, "Broadcasting has always been a child of mixed parentage: public interest and commercial profit" (1956, p. 338).

A great tension exists between two competing models for achieving broadcasting in the public interest – a tension that pits government regulation against free market forces in society. Between these opposing forces lies the central question: Which model will lead towards the best "product" for U.S. citizens? Since the 1800s, two

[4] In 1998, the Gore Commission on the Future of Broadcasting and the Public Interest issued a report recommending the FCC adopt new public interest requirements for broadcasters. That did not happen. According to Leslie Moonves, president of CBS and the co-chair of the commission, any attempt by the commission to define public interest obligations would amount to a "declaration of war" against broadcasters (Bishop & Hakanen, 2002, p. 274).

philosophical camps have formed. The first camp believes that, because of their potential impact on civic health and well-being, the U.S. government should closely regulate the mass media and protect the marketplace of ideas. On the other side of this debate stand those who believe capitalism and market forces, left to their own devices, will generate the information people need and want. Ironically, the metaphor of the marketplace finds a home in both camps.

To better understand the ways in which a "Free Market Model" competes with a "Public Trustee Model" of communications, a comparison of their competing arguments is called for. In *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest,* Croteau and Hoynes summarized the two competing perspectives in the following chart:

Chart 3:1:
Summary of Competing Media Models
Source: The Business of Media (Croteau & Hoynes, 2001, p. 37)

Central Question:	**Market Model**	**Public Sphere Model**
How are media conceptualized?	Private companies selling products	Public resources serving the public
What is the primary purpose of the media?	Generate profits for owners and stockholders	Promote active citizenship via information, education, and social integration
How are audiences addressed?	As consumers	As citizens
What are the media encouraging people to do?	Enjoy themselves, view ads, and buy products	Learn about their world and be active citizens
What is in the public interest?	Whatever is popular	Diverse, substantive, and innovated content, even if not always popular
What is the role of diversity and innovation?	Innovation can be a threat to profitable standardized formulas. Diversity can be a strategy for reaching new niche markets	Innovation is central to engaging citizens. Diversity is central to media's mission of representing the range of the public's views and tastes
How is regulation perceived?	Mostly seen as interfering with market processes	Useful tool in protecting the public interest
To whom are the media ultimately accountable?	Owners and shareholders	The public and government representatives
How is success measured?	Profits	Serving the public interest

Such a summary is exceptionally helpful. However, given the nature of the present research project and its specific focus on media ownership consolidation, more specific details are needed. Therefore, the following discussion relies heavily upon statements and documents which relate directly to the issue of media ownership and FCC regulatory (or deregulatory) policy process. By relying on the perspectives of both policy leaders and those attempting to sway policy, the scope of the competing ideas can be more fully distinguished. The arguments summarized here are by no means exhaustive. They are, however, representative of the central tenets of both regulatory philosophies.

Marketplace Model

By most accounts, the "Marketplace" or "Free Market" approach to U.S. media policy took hold in the 1980s. During the Reagan administration, a policy of deregulation was felt across many American industries, including broadcasting (Horowitz, 1989). New arguments were put forth about how the public's interests could be best protected. In the view of deregulation supporters, media industries, unfettered by government regulation, are best suited to determine what is in the public's interest because it is in their financial best interests to do so.

Market economists, policy experts, broadcast owners and media managers are among the most vocal supporters of deregulation.   One of the movement's most highly visible leaders has been Mark Fowler, former Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission under President Reagan. Fowler had a front row seat to the first major rounds of deregulation in the United States. In a *Texas Law Review* article published in 1982, he and co-author Daniel Brenner summed up the perspective of those who support the marketplace model: "Our thesis is that the perception of broadcasters as community trustees should be replaced by a view of broadcasters as marketplace participants. Communications policy should be directed toward maximizing the services the public desires" (Fowler & Brenner, 1982, p. 209).

According to Fowler and Brenner, the nation was long overdue for a national policy that "account(s) for market forces in radio and television and accommodates the First Amendment rights of those who operate commercial stations" (p. 207). Fowler argued that the "public interest, convenience, and necessity" standard set forth in the Communications Act of 1934 was far too "supple" an instrument to make sound ownership policy (p. 214), and that "vague licensing criterion" and "legal fictions" have contributed to troubles in U.S. media policy (p. 207). Like Fowler and Brenner, those who support a marketplace model tend to identify a series of problems and specific solutions in the regulatory debate. The following is a point-by-point summary of their "marketplace" perspectives:

<u>Problem: Increased Competition:</u> In the modern media environment, broadcasters now have to struggle to compete against competition from other media providers and new technologies, such as cable, direct broadcasting, satellite, video home recorders, and the internet. The central problem in U.S. media policy is that the Federal Communications Commission "has traditionally refused to recognize the undeniable fact that commercial broadcasting is a business" (Fowler & Brenner, p. 210). In February of 2003, the FCC held a single public hearing to discuss the issue of media ownership deregulation. Several panelists were invited to provide insight into industry as well as social and political concerns. In his statement before the Commission, Victor Miller, a "broadcast equity analyst" for Bear, Stearns & Co., Inc. noted that primetime viewing shares of the major American networks dropped from 90% in 1980 to 38% in 2003

(Miller, 2003, p. 1). Miller argues cable's increased share of the market may be broadcast television's greatest threat – both locally and nationally.

Problem: Declining Revenues: While competition is increasing, revenues and the cost of doing business are going up. Jay Ireland, President of NBC Television Stations, noted in his FCC testimony that "roughly 87 percent of the nation's media revenues went to industries other than the broadcast television industry" (Ireland, 2003,. p. 1). Simultaneously, primetime programming costs have increased by nearly 50% (Ireland, p. 2). The struggle between increased competition, declining revenues, and higher costs is leading to poor economic performance on the part of broadcast media. Miller points out "the broadcast networks are not very profitable," generating only $2 billion in profits on approximately $39 billion in revenue, a 5% margin" (Miller, 2003, p. 3). Without a new model of media regulation, Miller argues, the broadcast industries are in danger of dying out.

Problem: Spectrum Scarcity: U.S. media policy is formulated around an argument that the broadcast spectrum is a scarce resource. Stanford-educated economist Bruce Owen argues "the 'scarcity doctrine' is and always has been a factual and economic absurdity" (2003, p. 5). He believes the spectrum is only scarce because the FCC makes it so, an opinion shared by Fowler and Brenner. They call the FCC's decision to reserve certain portions of the spectrum for broadcast media (and to distribute that space for free) America's "original electromagnetic sin" (p. 212). According to Fowler, the FCC could eliminate the spectrum scarcity problem by making technological and philosophical revisions: decreasing bandwidth, adding channels, revising interference rules, and granting more local licenses (p. 222-224). In addition, Fowler and Brenner argue that the scarcity question, as it has been historically addressed, takes aim at the wrong problem: "The scarcity rationale focuses on the wrong scarce resource, megahertz, instead of advertising dollars. Even in the indirect marketplace of over-the-air broadcasting, the number of stations depends on the amount of advertising dollars or on other funding sources in the community" (p. 223). In other words, scarce advertising dollars are far more a problem than finding space on the "dial."

Problem: 1st Amendment Conflicts: Despite what the courts may have found in *Red Lion*, free market supporters argue that the broadcast media should not be regulated differently than other media providers, including print and cable operators. That they are is unfair and contrary to the First Amendment (Fowler & Brenner; Owen). Fowler and Brenner argue that the content regulation of commercial radio and television is fundamentally at odds with the First Amendment (p. 256) and that "so long as program review is part of the licensing process... First Amendment problems will persist" (p. 219). They further point out that "the language of the First Amendment protects the right of speech, not the right of access to ideas or even the right to listen" (p. 237).

Owen agrees that the FCC's policies to facilitate "content diversity" infringe upon the First Amendment rights of broadcasters. Not only are content-based decisions unnecessary, he claims they are impractical because no one can clearly define or measure the concept of "diverse" content (p. 6). In addition, Owns argues there is no research linking ownership concentration to decreased diversity of content. According to Fowler and Brenner, the FCC's ownership policies have actually *decreased* diversity by raising barriers to entry and discouraging competition. A marketplace approach, they argue, "emphasizes the role of new competitors, and new competition among existing firms, to ensure service in the public interest" (p. 231).

Solution: Outlet Diversity: While content or viewpoint diversity may be important, the only sound solution for measuring diversity, as a policy goal, is by examining "source" diversity (Ireland; Miller; Owen). Source diversity involves counting the number of outlets and owners producing content versus the examining the content itself. In Miller's testimony before the FCC, he noted that the current media marketplace consists of 10 broadcast networks, 1372 commercial TV stations and 287 national and 56 regional cable networks. According to him, the typical local household had 82 channels available to it versus 10 in 1980. "This robust and opinion-filled marketplace… has been good for consumers" (Miller, p. 1).

Ireland's figures are slightly different than Miller's. Overall, however, he claims that there has been a 200 percent increase in the number of media outlets – and a 139 percent increase in the number of owners – since 1960. Ireland believes every single local market in the United States has enough media outlets to safely protect viewpoint diversity (p. 4).

Solution: Content Substitutes: Even if there weren't enough broadcast sources in media markets, free market supporters argue that Americans have a virtual cornucopia of media options. Thanks to technological advancements, consumers can go to multiple sources for news, information, and entertainment. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to separately regulate broadcast ownership and content: "In the marketplace of ideas …

what matters is the number of alternative information outlets available to consumers. How big they are, and who owns them, shouldn't factor in. Each source of ideas is different" (Owen, p. 9). Fowler and Brenner agree that the many sources of media content – cable, satellite, low power TV, cassettes, discs, and direct broadcasting – should be recognized as acceptable substitutes for over-the-air distribution (p. 225).

<u>Solution: Free Market Competition:</u> Free market supporters argue that, by far, the best way to achieve diversity and localism goals is to leave the markets free to regulate themselves. A competitive media industry, left to its own devices, will naturally generate exciting and interesting content in order to gain audiences. Media providers who do not serve the public, will perish. Therefore, it is in their financial best interests to provide what the market wants. Owen argues that government cannot reliably improve on competitive markets: "Competition is the best protection for consumer access to ideas and information. Media, competing against each other for audience 'eyeballs' and consumer and advertiser dollars, will be led 'as if by an invisible hand' to serve the public interest in promoting First Amendment values." (p. 7). Instead of allowing the government to demand certain categories of diverse content, Fowler and Brenner contend "the commission should rely on the broadcasters' ability to determine the wants of their audiences through the normal mechanisms of the marketplace (p. 210).

<u>Solution: Let Consumers Decide:</u> Consumers are best situated to decide whether media content suits their needs. If companies produce products that fail to fulfill their desires, "The viewer always retains ultimate control over what enters his home; he may choose to turn the channel" (Fowler & Brenner, p. 229). Ratings, therefore, under the

marketplace model, are the best reflection of quality programming. "The public's interests," claim Fowler and Brenner, "defines the public interest" (p. 210).

Solution: Consolidation is Good for Diversity & Localism: By consolidating resources and cutting down on duplicative operating and overhead expenses, media companies are able to achieve operational "efficiencies" which, in turn, allow them to reinvest resources in the production of news and entertainment content. Bob Wright, Chariman and CEO of NBC and Vice Chairman of GE, argues, in NBC's case, network ownership of a local station means it will receive "superior newsgathering and technical resources that enable it to enhance and extend its local programming… A smaller owner, with more limited resources, is all too often forced to jettison expensive local news coverage in favor of less expensive programming imported from national syndicators" (Wright, 2003, p. 63). In short, consolidation is good for the community and good for business. Ireland agrees that efficiencies are key because, without them, "the broadcast networks will no longer be able to afford to obtain the top-quality programming that viewers have grown accustomed to" (p. 5).

Broadcasters are not alone in supporting this argument. John Sturm, President and CEO of the Newspaper Association of America, in his statement before the FCC, argued that repealing the ban on cross-ownership of TV and newspapers will improve content by bringing the combined resources of their newsgathering resources together in local communities to improve news coverage and information programming: "With the ability to draw on this locally oriented heritage and journalistic expertise, co-owned broadcast nations naturally are able to provide more in-depth coverage of local news and public affairs than other media outlets in their communities" (Sturm, 2003, p. 2).

Solution: Deregulation of Media Ownership: More than two decades ago, Fowler and Brenner concluded that the marketplace has two distinct advantages over government regulation. First, the market model does not conflict with the Supreme Court's ruling in *Red Lion*. "In basing editorial and program judgments on their perceptions of popular demand, broadcasters enforce the paramount interests of listeners and viewers. Even if licensees occasionally misperceive the wants of their audiences, the present regulatory system, which is based upon the Commission's judgment of the community's needs, does not ensure a better result" (p. 241). Second, Fowler and his co-author argue that the marketplace approach "accords protection to the distinct constitutional status of broadcasters under the press clause" (242). They also believe, by pursuing the public trustee model, broadcasters are being held to too high a standard. The FCC, they argue, has turned broadcasters into "a super-citizen, with obligations that go beyond providing goods and services that the public wants" (p. 220).

U.S. media policy, they contend, has had a damaging effect on content options and choices for Americans. Instead of government regulation, advertisers should act as the representative for consumers, "sometimes for all consumers, sometimes for demographic subgroups. This representative form of program selection is well served … by the fact that a program, once broadcast, is available to additional consumers without cost" (Fowler & Brenner, p. 232). To Fowler and Brenner, the issue is not whether the marketplace is fully efficient, "rather it is whether the Commission, by ignoring until recently the realities of the broadcasting business, has substituted a system of regulation by trusteeship that has caused more harm than good" (p. 233).

Owen echoes the consumer-based approach. He argues that there are only three key questions to ask when ownership is under examination: "Which sellers offer choices that customers find attractive? Are there enough such sellers to provide effective competition? Are there significant barriers to entry?" (p. 2). Overwhelmingly, the focus is on "consumers." As such, Owen believes the Federal Trade Commission and the Justice Department are far better suited than the FCC to judge whether media mergers are appropriate. Compared to the FCC, these antitrust agencies, he says, "will ensure even greater competition in the marketplace of ideas" (p. 14).

Public Trustee Model

Whether you call it the "Public Trustee," the "Public Sphere," or the "Public Interest" Model, supporters of this view believe that the mass media will only serve the public's best interests when the government requires them to do so. In their view, free market modeling should never be applied to America's media system. First and foremost, supporters of this view argue that the specific needs of American democracy demand a media system that addresses the needs and interests of all Americans. They contend that corporations in a capitalist system rarely, if ever, put the public's needs ahead of their own, financial gain. Corporate broadcasters, they argue, are more likely to "create" products that serve the needs of advertisers who, technically, pay the bills for free, off-the-air programming. Without government regulations, large corporations and media conglomerates will seek to produce content at the lowest possible prices which only target lucrative demographic groups, groups that are attractive to advertisers, versus the public as a whole.

If Mark Fowler is the FCC Chairman most oft-quoted regarding deregulatory desires of broadcasters, Newton Minow is the one who issued the clarion call in favor of continued government regulation. FCC Chairman under John F. Kennedy, Minow delivered a famous speech to the National Association of Broadcasters in 1961 in which he disagreed with the philosophy that the market should decide: "Free market folks say public interest is merely what interests the public" (Minow, 2003, p. 396). In his speech, reprinted recently in the *Federal Communications Law Journal* (2003), Minow argued that, left to its own devices, broadcasters, through a focus on ratings, desires of advertisers, and the cost of doing business had turned the spectrum into a "vast wasteland' (p. 398). Fundamentally, he argued, what broadcasters deliver:

> …through the people's air affects the people's taste, their knowledge, their opinions, their understanding of themselves and of their world. And their future. The power of instantaneous sight and sound is without precedent in mankind's history. This is an awesome power. It has limitless capabilities for good – and for evil. And it carries with it awesome responsibilities – responsibilities which you and I cannot escape. (p. 405)

Minow encouraged broadcasters to "ask not what broadcasting can do for you. Ask what you can do for broadcasting" (p. 405).

While his admonishment came more than four decades ago, those who hold similar views have picked up the mantel in the recent debates over U.S. media policy. Consumer groups, small companies, media scholars, economists, political theoreticians, musicians, union members, and private citizens have come forward to argue the need for continued government regulation to protect the public's best interests. The following is a synopsis of their primary arguments, including rebuttals to the marketplace model of broadcasting. These views are not exhaustive but are generally representative of the scope of their argument.

Issue: Competition & Outlet Diversity: Those in favor of regulation agree that the modern media environment is substantially different than it was when American broadcast media policy came into being – largely because new delivery methods have been devised, such as cable, direct broadcasting, and satellites. In her comments to the FCC's Field Hearing on Broadcast Ownership, Linda Foley, who represents the Newspaper Guild and the Communications Workers of America, acknowledges the market is changing and that no one knows this better than media workers, who have to adjust to market conditions as they produce news, information, and entertainment programming for Americans (Foley, 2003, p. 1).

Public trustee supporters argue, however, that more sources of information do not necessarily mean more competition (Bozell, 2003, Foley, 2003; Riskin, 2003; Croteau, 2003). Primarily, the issue involves who owns the new media sources. Victoria Riskin, with the Writers Guild of America, points out that media content production in the United States is dominated by a handful of vertically-integrated conglomerates (2003, p. 3). She argues that, as recently as December 2002, five conglomerates controlled about 75% of prime-time viewing between broadcasting and cable outlets, giving them a clear, competitive advantage (p. 2). Jonathan Rintels, Executive Director for the non-profit

Center for the Creative Community, Inc., contends that these corporations, with their broadcast and cable networks, "are now on the verge of controlling the same number of television households as the big three broadcast networks did forty years ago" (Rintels, 2003, p. 1). Rintels points out the same programming oligopoly controls the most visited sites on the Internet as well (p. 3).

Fragmentation of the audience is, admittedly, a serious problem for the broadcast networks. According to Croteau and Hoynes (2001), however, the networks are still highly competitive. Despite losing a significant share of their viewers in the past two decades, the networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX) still attract about half of the viewing audience, a figure far above the audience numbers that individual cable channels attract (p. 124-126). In their book, *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest*, Croteau and Hoynes compared the top-ten rated network programs between the week of April 24-30, 2000. They found that the strongest cable show was WWF Entertainment (a professional wrestling program) with a 6.1 rating, compared to a 19.6 rating for ER on NBC. The ratings gap between the remaining nine programs was similarly large (p. 126).

<u>Issue: Declining Revenues</u>: Broadcast profit margins may be lower than they were in the 1950s and 1960s, yet the broadcast media owners still garner the lion's share of advertising revenues. According to research conducted specifically for the FCC's review of ownership rules, Levy, Ford-Livene, and Levine (2002) found that advertising revenues have remained relatively strong and have, in fact, been stronger than expected in recent years (p. 18). Contrary to the doomsday projections published in one of their

previous reports, the authors find that the broadcast media are actually doing quite well. Levy at al. claim broadcasters stand to do even better in the future once they find a way to harness new digital and Internet technologies for their own use (p. 95). In short, these authors argue that the popularity of cable and other competing technologies over broadcast will likely lead to changes that are "evolutionary not revolutionary" (p. 44).

Marketplace model supporters argue that the growing cost of producing quality programming is hurting their profit margins. Production costs are going up, however, because the networks are now producing their own content. Public trustee critics contend that the increased cost of programming is directly associated with the elimination of the Financial Interest and Syndication rules – a policy change, ironically, the networks lobbied for. According to Croteau, the broadcast networks now own nearly 80% of their prime-time programming – four times as much as they did when the so-called Fin/Syn rules were in place (p. 2). Riskin points out that, in 1992, 16 new series were produced independently of conglomerate control. In 2002, there was one (p. 1). Because they own their own programming, and the networks also own cable and video services, they can re-package and re-purpose it on cable to distribute the costs across media platforms and make it even more lucrative (Croteau, p. 2).

Issue: The 1st Amendment Conflicts: Those who support the public trustee model of broadcasting argue that, even if government regulation of ownership concentration decreases their competitive advantage, profit maximization has never been the sole point of U.S. communications policy (Gomery, 2002, p. 2). Through the Communications Act of 1934 and through *AP v. US* and *Red Lion v. FCC*, the Courts and

Congress have long recognized business concerns but have placed democratic assumptions above all else (Croteau & Hoynes, 2001). According to the Consumer Federation of America, while protection of consumer interests requires vigorous antitrust enforcement for any commodity, they contend that media markets require more: "Because of media's role in promoting civic discourse, the public interest standard for ownership has always been much higher (Consumer Federation, p. 1). According to Gomery (2002), whether they like it or not, broadcasters are "not simple firms reducible to profit-generating equations but rather are large, complex social, cultural, and political institutions… that have an impact on the public welfare" (p. 2).

Public trustee supporters believe the broadcast media continue to serve a unique role in democracies that value free and creative expression, independent thought, and diverse perspectives. According to Croteau (2003), in recognition of this unique public interest role, the free press is the only business explicitly protected in the U.S. Constitution: "We cannot, therefore, treat the media like any other industry. Its products are not widgets or toasters; they are culture, information, ideas, and viewpoints. Consequently, we must be especially vigilant in protecting and preserving the public interest as it relates to this vitally important industry" (p. 1).

Riskin reminds regulators that "The media are the modern-day American Town Square, the place where people from different backgrounds and points of view share their stories and the public learns about the world. Here is where American democracy comes alive and the American identity is forged" (p. 1). She believes, however, that media ownership concentration in the United States has erected barriers that keep "all but a handful of voices from being heard" (p. 1).

Issue: Deregulation negatively impacts diversity & localism: Marketplace supporters argue that deregulation of media ownership will lead to a greater number of outlets. Outlet diversity is tantamount, they argue, to content diversity. This view is highly contested by those who support the public trustee model. According to Croteau (2003), relaxation of ownership regulations moves in exactly the wrong direction. While increasing profits, he argues, further deregulation would, in all likelihood, have three effects. It would: (1) promote further concentration of media ownership, thereby undermining competition; (2) reduce the already limited diversity in commercial media content; and (3) reduce the quality, and sometimes the quantity, of locally produced media content (p. 1).

Public trustee supporters point to the impact of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 as evidence of decreasing diversity of content. The Act significantly deregulated ownership in the radio broadcast industry. According to Williams and Roberts' examination of radio ownership (2002), following passage of the act, the number of radio stations increased more than five percent but the number of radio owners decreased by more than one-third. The change enabled a single corporation, Clear Channel, to go from owning 40 radio stations to owning more than 1200 – five times its nearest competitor (Williams and Roberts).

Market supporters argue such a change leads to *more* diversity in content because Clear Channel and other similar organizations would not want to compete against themselves in markets where they owned multiple outlets. Therefore, they argue, Clear Channel and other similar conglomerates program music on their stations to appeal to different demographic groups and different musical tastes. In response, public trustee supporters argue companies like Clear Channel immediately seek to lower overhead costs by programming music from one central location and disseminating that programming to multiple, local communities. Ray Benson, co-founder and guitarist from the band "Asleep at the Wheel" made just such an argument before the FCC's localism task force hearings in San Antonio, Texas. He complained that such "efficient" industry practices had dramatically affected the diversity of music broadcast on public airwaves, reduced local musicians' access to the airwaves, and could have profound effects on the future of music in America (Benson, 2004).

Public trustee supporters point to a similar problem of homogenization and decreasing diversity of content in television entertainment. Jonathan Rintels (2003) is a screenwriter and conducts research on behalf of writers, directors, and producers. In his appearance before the FCC, he argued that the conventional wisdom that a "five hundred channel universe" assures viewpoint diversity of sources and competition in the marketplace of ideas is false. He argues that corporate consolidation of ownership has led to the near extinction of creative entrepreneurs and small businesses and creates bland, homogenized programming (p. 3). Riskin agrees. In her estimation, it has been increasingly difficult to bring innovative shows to the air: "nearly one hundred small and medium-sized businesses – each with its unique point of view – have disappeared in the last ten years" (p. 3). The issue is a matter for public concern, she contends, because, in entertainment programming, the number of unique programs produced by writers and producers who care deeply about original drama and comedy, history, and culture have been sacrificed to mass market logic and ratings (p. 3).

Perhaps nowhere is the concern about content diversity and consolidation more profound than in the production of local news and public affairs programming. Foley believes simply increasing the number of outlets in a market does little to produce more antagonistic sources" (p. 2). When it comes to news, she claims viewers cannot necessarily select from a variety of sources because local media markets are so highly-concentrated, with most cities having only one newspaper and 70% of U.S. cities having four or fewer stations carrying original local news. And many public trustee supporters contend that, even with several outlets, viewers are unable to actually make an informed choice. For-profit journalism and ownership consolidation, they contend, have led to less diversity of opinion than ever before (Gomery, 2002, p. 1).

The ways in which corporate profit seeking interferes with gathering and dissemination of local news and public affairs programming will be discussed in detail shortly. However, the overall concern among supporters of the public trustee model is that economies of scale and synergies accomplished through corporate consolidation have significant, deleterious effects on the diversity of views and quality of content in the local political and cultural discourse (Gomery, 2002; McDermott, 2003),

<u>Issue: Content Substitutes & Technology</u>: Public trustee supporters contest the idea that cable and internet sources are substitutes for over-the-air broadcasting. According to Linda Foley, research shows that consumers of news and information do

not substitute sources, but rather use other media outlets to complement their primary source of news and information (p. 2). Therefore, she and others contend that cable and internet sites, as alternative sources for information, should *not* be considered in ownership consolidation proceedings. The Communications Workers of America agree. In their brief to the FCC, they point to research which shows advertisers do not consider cable and internet to be as important as broadcast television. Therefore, they argue, it should not be assumed that consumers see them as interchangeable "substitutes" (Communication Workers of America, 2003, p. 9).

Technology plays a significant role in the issue of media "substitutes." While cable, satellite, and internet have changed the media landscape, and indeed have become new and exciting sources of information, public trustee supporters do not believe the new technologies relieve broadcasters of their public interest burden. According to Croteau (2003), every time new media technology has been introduced, enthusiasts have believed they would be the answer to society's informational needs. In each case, he argues, however, "the fundamental questions about new media technologies have remained the same, including: Who will own and control them? What purpose will they serve? Whose views and visions will be represented in the new medium?" (p. 2).

In addition, public trustee supporters contend that cable and internet are not even options for many Americans. They point to research which shows that one quarter of Americans do not subscribe to cable (either because they do not have access or cannot afford it). Fewer still have regular access at home or work to the internet (Waldfogel, 2002). Many citizens continue to rely on broadcasters as their primary source of news, information, and entertainment fare. As Rintels notes: "…in much of Virginia, including my own home, broadband is a distant rumor. Even among Virginia families fortunate enough to have broadband, I've yet to hear of any (families) that microwave popcorn and gather around the computer to watch Internet. They watch television" (p. 3).

Issue: Let Consumers Decide: Marketplace proponents believe that consumers are best suited to select for themselves what's in their best interests and that they do so every day, when they vote with their remotes. By changing the channel, they can find what they need or want. Or, they can turn it off. Marketplace proponents believe that ratings, therefore, are a proxy for measuring the quality of content. Ratings, however, are a highly contested method of measuring content quality – a method that public trustee supporters strongly contest, even as far back as Newton Minow, who said "a rating, at best, is an indication of how many people saw what you gave them" (2003, p. 398). More recently, Cooper (2003) argues that the standards should be different when news and public affairs programming are involved: "It may be perfectly acceptable for consumers to be forced to vote with their dollars and turn off commercial entertainment, but it is not acceptable for citizens to be turned off by the poor quality of civic discourse, and then have no comparable alternative to which they can turn" (p. 14).

Cooper runs the Center for Internet and Society at Stanford and is Research Director for the Consumer Federation of America. He believes that, even for entertainment programming, there are serious problems with the "vote with your remote" philosophy. His biggest concern is the "tyranny of the majority" that comes with mass-mediated messages (p. 37). Market logic dictates that media owners produce content that will be commercially viable. Therefore, they seek out programming that attracts the audiences advertisers want to reach. Content that appeals to "target demographic groups" becomes paramount. Cooper complains that this system of preference often becomes a form of economic discrimination against minority viewpoints and that citizens' needs aren't necessarily addressed (p. 35). Schwartzman agrees. As president and CEO of the Media Access Project, Jay Schwartzman believes the market "does not recognize and serve the needs of those who are too old, too young or too poor to be demographically attractive" (2003). Croteau and Hoynes believe such fragmentation might even exacerbate cultural divisions by "segregating programming to target demos based on age, race, and class" (p. 106).

Solution: Continued Regulation of Media Ownership: Public trustee supporters believe government policies and regulations are far more likely to serve the needs of American citizens than a free market approach. As Croteau and Hoynes point out, media corporations simply have different goals than citizens do. Corporations seek to (1) maximize profits; (2) reduce costs by improving efficiency and streamlining departments; and (3) reduce risk by controlling the environment in which they operate (p. 145). One way to reduce risk is to reduce competition, which is an essential component of healthy markets. These authors contend that corporate consolidation in the broadcast markets has led to characteristics of monopoly behavior: "Thus, even by market standards, the concentration of media ownership presents serious problems" (p. 145).

Gomery calls broadcast television a powerful oligopoly and he contends that oligopolies are not good for democratic discourse (2002, p. 5). The increased market power of consolidated voices, he claims, has led to serious "negative externalities," in which profit maximization has overtaken the concerns of localism and diversity (p. 2). Rintels (2003) agrees that the oligopolistic state of American broadcast media has eliminated both creative and economic competition.

The overwhelming call of public trustee supporters is to continue to regulate media ownership and they've made their case very clear in recent media ownership hearings before the FCC: "While common ownership of media properties may enhance efficiencies, the Commission's charge is to protect and enhance media diversity, competition, and local identity – not efficiency…. Therefore, the Commission must adopt strong structural rules to preserve and promote diversity, competition, and local identity in the media" (Communication Workers of America, 2003, p. ii).

Public Interest & Political Economy

The specific arguments offered by public trustee supporters closely mirror more theoretical ones put forth by a number of scholars. There are many who believe political and economic institutions in America profoundly influence the quality of media content, making it impossible for broadcasters to pursue their public interest responsibilities. The problem, they argue, is not particular to any one media organization but is, instead, systemic.

The Problem: Systemic Influences on Media Content:

As early as 1922, Walter Lippmann maintained that the media deliver a "tilted" message to the American public that mirrors wealthy and powerful forces in society – messages that are simultaneously shaped by government censorship and propaganda as well as the commercial demands of a for-profit press. As a former journalist, Lippmann was highly concerned about the way the government had used the mass media to shape public attitudes about America's war effort. He was equally concerned, however, about the ways in which the economic basis of journalism shaped the nature of news. Ultimately, he came to believe that while the press may be able to help formulate public policy, the media cannot facilitate self-governance for the American people (p. 19). The press, he said, is not in a position to provide truth. It can only report what is recorded by institutions (p. 226-228).

Where Lippmann saw two forces affecting the quality of political discourse in the press, Altschull (1995) sees four. He contends that media are victims in a complicated political process, having to serve four paymasters, including: (1) the government (through rules and regulations); (2) commercial interests of businesses and advertisers; (3) financing enterprises; and (4) friends, relatives, and lobbying groups who regularly voice their interests to media workers. Because they pay the bills, Altchull argues advertisers, however, are the predominant paymasters. The purported role of the press may be to address vital conflicts and issues within society, but Altschull argues that the only role it can play is one that supports the vital interests of the people who finance it. This symbiotic relationship between media outlets and advertisers has a demonstrable impact on the quality of programming content (p. 49).

Entman (1989) sees the situation somewhat differently. Instead of being in a symbiotic relationship with financiers, he contends the media's messages are more directly influenced by political forces. In *Democracy Without Citizens,* Entman posits the press is restricted by its reliance upon political elites for most of their information. Because of this, journalists participate in an *interdependent* news system, not a free market of ideas. In practice, then, the news media fall far short of the ideal vision of a free press as civic educator and guardian of democracy. This is a view shared by other political economists, including Sparrow (1999), who argues the news media has actually become a political institution in and of itself – an institution that, at best, is an "uncertain guardian" of the public's best interests.

Corporations and For-Profit Journalism

There are many others, however, that refuse to place the burden for the media's failures squarely on America's political system. The media are not victims of the system but perpetrators. They are not agents of more powerful forces in society, but powerful forces themselves. These theorists argue that the corporations which own the media directly influence the scope and quality of the media messages the American public receives.

While their seminal writings on the matter were published nearly two decades apart, Gitlin (1980) and McChesney (1997) both argue mass media's corporate owners are part of a larger super-structure of America's political system and have a powerful stake – both political and financial – in the process. Gitlin sees the media operating in a complex and complicated "force field of intersecting political pressures" (p. 261). He argues that privately controlled corporations have become "intimate allies" with the bureaucratic national security state (p. 9). Because corporate owners must protect the powerful groups with whom they share power, the media, Gitlin argues, must "frame" their coverage in ways that perpetuate the status quo. This is especially problematic when it comes to news gathering. In his examination of media coverage during anti-war Vietnam protests, Gitlin demonstrated that Americans who contest the government policies or dominant cultural practices are systematically "trivialized," "polarized," "marginalized," and "delegitimized."

McChesney offers a similar view. As part of the capitalist system, McChesney (1997) believes that media owners will only give the audience what they want "within the range of what is most profitable to produce and/or in the political interests of the producers" (p. 45). In *Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy*, he contends that the metaphor of a marketplace has become a valuable shield for the mass media industries to mystify actual corporate domination. Specifically, McChesney believes the mass media manipulate content to support the opinion that the current system of government is the best that anyone could hope for. This, he argues, necessarily limits the range of democratic debate, especially in news and public affairs programming (p. 15).

As a result, he claims not only do the media fail to serve the political and social interests of society, they are 'anti-democratic," protecting the social and political positions of target demographics and corporate elites (p. 23).

McChesney and Gitlin both believe the system works subtly versus overtly. The system, they believe, is maintained predominantly through a series of news gathering routines and norms that naturalize the process. Bagkidian (1997) is far less forgiving. He contends that corporate consolidation of media ownership leads to the direct "manipulation of news and information to ensure the owners' financial and political goals" (p. xii). Modern technology and American economics have, he argues, quietly created a new kind of central authority over information – a "a new communication cartel" (p. ix.):

> When fifty men and women, chiefs of their corporations, control more than half the information and ideas that reach 220 million Americans, it is time for Americans to examine the institutions from which they receive their daily picture of the world (p. xlix).

According to Bagdikian, instead of serving the public's best interests, the media promote corporate values in the American system, maintain the status quo, keep consumers buying, and make sure the current political system stays safely in place. In order to achieve that end, Bagdikian contends that media owners seek to purchase as many different kinds of media as possible. He argues the current patterns of media consolidation are alarming, primarily because they lead directly to decreased diversity of voices.

Bagdigian believes consolidation has reached a level of Orewllian proportions in the United States. The number of controlling firms continues to shrink. And these owners, he argues, are involved in "interlocking alliances" with each other, government officials, and other big businesses – sharing seats on the same private industry boards and government committees. Because the media have the power to affect the futures of their powerful peers, however, Bagdikian believes they are among the most powerful "leaders" in America.

According to Bagkidian, broadcast news media (namely radio and television) have become the most effective instruments of social control ever conceived. Of greatest concern to Bagdikian are the unseen effects of corporate/capitalist values on news coverage. Because the media owners value profits above the public interest, he claims they are willing to cut news resources to the bone; eliminating foreign bureaus, cutting local news staffs, squelching longer-form journalism (and context), decreasing the length of stories, and favoring visuals and quick and easy coverage events over investigations or social issues. Original reporting, he argues, is slipping away in favor of mass-produced news, regional feed services, public relations material, and syndicated news items. He says this coverage results in "locally broadcast programs that are in fact standardized national ones with no relationship to civic needs" (xxix.) In the end, he argues, the corporate greed of the media owners is leading to an "undernourished society" missing "the news and ideas necessary for informed democratic decision making" (p. 44).

While he addresses individual communities, Bagdikian's examination of corporate news focuses primarily upon national entities. McManus (1994), on the other hand, focuses expressly on the local. He calls local television news an elaborate compromise between business special interests and the consumer, not a "reflection of reality."

Through economies of scale and the impact of corporate cultural values, news, he argues, has become a commodity to be bought and sold (p. 54). Like Bagdikian, McManus finds local television news coverage has largely become a function of market logic, not journalistic ideals, where corporate owners seek to produce the best available product at the lowest possible price.

According to McManus, rational routines, efficiencies, and the logic of maximum returns for minimum input often conflict with the logic of maximum public understanding (p. 90). Media makers look for exciting, interesting, and compelling issues and investigations but only during ratings periods when the higher costs can be best justified. Although "active discovery" of news is considered vital to a healthy news department that works in the public interest, McManus found that was not a factor in most news operations. Instead, he found the majority of journalists relied on hand-outs, press releases, scheduled events, and easy-access spot news to drive their coverage. This sort of news is, he argues, clearly easier and cheaper to produce. As for objectivity, he found that journalists regularly failed to meet the most basic standards of balance in many of their stories. In most cases, the failure wound up supporting the social institutions carrying the most power, reasserting the status quo.

Being profit driven, McManus contends the media are far more likely to serve the short-term goals of their investors than the long-term democratic needs of their audiences. Like Bagdikian, he concludes that corporate owners (and their stockholders) have taken control of America's newsgathering system by choosing how and when to invest their profits. Chomsky (2002) believes it is time for America's citizens to take control back – to recover rights which are "essential to a truly functioning democracy" (p. 15), including "the right to information and to free and open discussion, not filtered by the state-corporate nexus that has effectively shaped the major media into instruments of class power and domination" (p. 15). According to Chomsky, consolidation of ownership in the mass media degrades democracy, creating a system that promotes "'virtual Senate' of investors and speculative capital, who hold 'veto power' over governmental decisions and can punish 'bad policies' that might benefit the population rather than improving the climate for business operations" (p. 21). Ultimately, Chomsky argues ownership consolidation undermines the public service function of the broadcast media and "cast(s) a shadow over democracy" (p. 21).

A Sharp Rebuke

Critics contend that assaults such as those offered by Bagdikian, Chomsky and others are "simplistic, incomplete and narrow" (Gomery, 2000, p. 507). According to Gomery, left-leaning critics frequently assume an "all-encompassing conspiracy" is in place despite evidence to the contrary. For example, from an economic perspective, he calls some of Bagdikian's comments about broadcast monopolies "patently absurd" (p. 523). According to Gomery, scholars like Bagdikian have been far from objective in their examination of the media industries. Instead of examining ownership using appropriate (and more realistic) research tools, Gomery contends they frequently manufacture their arguments using anecdotal examples that illustrate "predetermined conclusions based on a single set of values" (2000, p. 507). Their theoretical arguments frequently fail to provide the empirical evidence they need to make a convincing claim.

"Critics to the left" are not Gomery's only target, however. He also takes aim at free market advocates "who assume that efficiency of operation represents the paramount, and often sole, goal for any enterprise (2000, p. 507). These right-leaning theorists, he argues, frequently fail to take into consideration the vital role that mass communication and mass entertainment play to democracy and the quality of American life:

> Broadcasters are not simple firms reducible to equations but large complex social, cultural and political institutions, with vast growing multinational power. Communication corporations are most complex because they do not 'simply' make automobiles, they make and distribute the communications of culture and politics. (2000, p. 508)

According to Gomery, studying the media as though simply contemplating the toaster or pencil industries offers a far too narrow perspective (2000, p. 507).

Gomery does not believe either approach will help policy makers or Americans make sense of media ownership. He contends that such normative discussions fail to contribute anything worthwhile to the policy process. To break the logjam, he posits an institutional economic model that takes into account both the "efficiencies" sought by the mass media industries and the "negative externalities" (economic, social, cultural, and political side effects) which can stem from a purely, free market approach to ownership.

Gomery's model involves a three-step process. First, researchers need to determine the structure of the "relevant market" to be examined and the type of competitive conditions which exist in the market (monopoly, oligopoly, monopolistic competition). Second, researchers must distinguish what the quality standards for that market might be. Third, researchers must find a way to examine the "performance" (or content) of that market.

Gomery says media scholars can help specify what appropriate criteria might be for performance evaluation. He points to six performance norms that have been examined in the past (2000, p. 523):

1) Media industries ought not to waste resources; They should be as efficient as possible;
2) Media industries ought to facilitate free speech and political discussion;
3) Media industries ought to facilitate public order;
4) Media industries ought to protect and maintain cultural quality and diversity;
5) Media industries ought to bring new technologies to the marketplace as quickly as possible;
6) Media industries ought to be equitable.

On this last point, Gomery refers directly to the problems of class which are often hidden within a free market approach to media studies. He points out that many Americans do not have access to cable, rightly implying that to examine the plethora of media choices without examining the real costs (or availability) of technology to the working classes is problematic.[5]

At its core, Gomery contends media economics must rationally examine how quality changes under different competitive and ownership conditions. He calls the examination of performance the "ultimate step in media economics analysis" (p. 509). According to him, "if we can link the study of the economics of ownership and corporate behavior to the communication qualities we desire, communication scholars can begin to

[5] Recent data show one-quarter of Americans do not receive cable (Waldfogel, 2002).

make recommendations for policy change that the players in real-world public policy discussion will take seriously" (p. 509). He, therefore, calls for an industry-by-industry examination on the structure, conduct, and performance of changing media economics (p. 527). Such a step, he contends, will help facilitate all citizens having access to many channels and sources, offering different content and alternative voices (p. 527). This is, at its most basic level, the public interest expectation for the American media system.

Summary

The media play a monumental role in American society. They are the conduits through which information about social, economic, and cultural institutions is shared. They shape what we know and understand about society and are a critical link between lawmakers and citizens. According to McChesney, in large, complex societies, an effective system of political communication is a key criterion for a functioning democracy (1997, p. 5). Such democratic assumptions significantly inform U.S. media policy. Because of their powerful role in society and because they use the public airwaves to ply their trade, broadcast media in particular are expected to serve the public's best interests. Therefore, their ownership structures and content are legally regulated (*AP v. US*, *Red Lion v. FCC*).

While no specific definition exists for the public interest, historically, it has been defined through the concepts of diversity and localism. For decades, however, policy makers and media scholars have debated how those goals should be defined and how they are best achieved. Two competing camps have formed. Free-market supporters believe diverse and local content will naturally arise if the government would only leave the media alone to compete. They support the deregulation of media ownership. Then there are those who believe a capitalist, corporate, and consolidated media will only serve the best interests of advertisers and stockholders – leaving citizens to fend for themselves. These public trustee supporters believe the government must maintain, if not tighten, media ownership regulation.

Both camps have used theoretical and anecdotal evidence to argue their points. Some critics believe, however, that neither approach will help policy makers or Americans make sense of media ownership. They call instead for reliable, empirical evidence. Of particular need are studies which evaluate media performance (or content)(Gomery, 2000, p. 523). That is exactly the type of research underway in the present study. Before discussing specifics of this research, the research, however, it is necessary to first examine the empirical evidence which *does* exist on the impact of ownership consolidation on media content.

CHAPTER 4:
The Current State of U.S. Media Policy & Empirical Research

In September of 2002, the Federal Communications Commission launched its Third Biennial Regulatory Review of Broadcast Ownership Rules. The FCC's review involved the examination of all six media ownership rules related to use of the broadcast spectrum. Half of the rules have been on the books for sixty years. They include:

- The Local Radio Ownership Rule (1941)
- The National Television Ownership Rule (1941)
- Dual Television Network Rule (1946)
- The Local Television Ownership Rule (1964)
- The Radio/TV Cross-Ownership Rule (1970)
- The Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Rule (1975)

The review marked "the beginning of the most comprehensive look at media ownership regulation ever undertaken by the FCC" ("FCC Initiates," 2002). According to the FCC, the objective of this proceeding was "to develop ownership rules and policies that are reflective of the current media marketplace, are based on empirical evidence, and are analytically consistent" ("FCC Initiates").

Congress, Courts & Republican Leadership: Deregulation & the Empirical Push

Heading into their review, the concepts of market forces, analytic consistency and empiricism were of particular concern to FCC policymakers. Together, the legislative, judicial, and executive branches were having a profound effect on the decision-making process. Through congressional action (*Telecommunications Act of 1996*), two critical court cases (*Fox v. FCC*, 2002; *Sinclair v. FCC*, 2002), and a particular philosophy on the part of the nation's President, a push for empirical research in relation to media ownership was well underway at the time the FCC began its biennial review. The following is a brief synopsis of the critical forces influencing the Commission's decision.

Legislative Action: In 1996, Congress passed the first major overhaul in telecommunications law in 62 years. *The Telecommunications Act of 1996* altered U.S. media policy in many critical ways. Among other things, Congress amended specific ownership policies relating to the mass media. Lawmakers made substantial changes to three radio and television rules: (1) eliminating a national limit on the number of radio stations one company could own; (2) easing restrictions on the number of radio stations one company could own in a single market; and (3) raising the limits on the number of television stations any one company could own nationwide. Before the Act, companies doing business in television were only allowed to own as many stations as would reach 25 percent of the American public. That figure increased to 35 percent under the Act.

More profound than specific policy changes, however, were the ways in which the Act addressed issues of the public interest and the role of the regulator. According to Aufderheide's deft evaluation of the Act in *Communications Policy and the Public Interest* (1999), through this legislation, Congress codified "the most explicit definition of the public interest, convenience, and necessity ever made in the law" (p. 74). The Act clarified congressional intent that the public's best interests are served by promoting pro-competitive market conditions (p. 74). It also precisely defined the FCC's role in regulating media policy which, according to Aufderheide, is "to substitute as discreetly as possible for a competitive marketplace, to promote competition, and (ultimately) to phase itself out" (p. 74).

Some pro-deregulation supporters argue the *Telecommunications Act* was worded in such a way as to push future FCC policy-making in a deregulatory direction. The Act required the FCC to reexamine its regulations every two years "to determine whether the rules *remained necessary* (my emphasis) in the public interest" ("FCC Initiates,").[6] At issue was whether the policies were the best way to promote competition, diversity, and localism or whether evolving market forces (e.g., competition and technological advancements) eliminated the need for such regulation. The presumption, according to FCC Chairman Michael Powell and other policymakers, was that – absent empirical evidence regarding harm to or health of the public interests – restrictions on media ownership in the United States would need loosening.

<u>Judicial Action:</u> Critical court rulings were also driving the push toward empirical measures. In 2002, the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington D.C. ruled on two separate cases in which media owners had sued the FCC over its broadcast ownership policies. In both cases, judges found in favor of broadcasters, ruling that the FCC had fashioned its rules using numbers that were not empirically justified.

In *Fox v. FCC* (2002), Fox Television Stations contested limits on national television ownership. The company wondered why the national ownership "cap" was set

[6] In January 2004, Congress amended the 1996 Act by increasing from 35% to 39% the national television ownership rule's audience reach cap. It also changed the FCC's review requirements, asking the commission to review ownership regulations every four years instead of every two years. See Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-109.

at 35% and not some other figure. Fox wanted the limits raised so it could purchase more television stations across the country. In its ruling, the Court upheld the constitutionality of media ownership limits in general but questioned the specific limits involved in the national "cap." Although the court believed that protecting diversity through limits was a permissible policy and served the public interest, it found that the FCC "did not provide an adequate basis for believing the (numerical) rules would in fact further that cause" (*Fox v. FCC*).

That same year, Sinclair Broadcast Group took the FCC to court over the *local* television ownership rule (*Sinclair v. FCC*, 2002). At the time, FCC policy forbade a single company from purchasing a second television station within a city unless, among other things, eight independent broadcast voices would remain in the market after the sale. Similar to Fox, Sinclair argued that the "8 voices rule" was unjustified and hurt the company's ability to compete. In this case as well as *Fo*x, the 3rd Circuit in Washington agreed that the FCC's ownership limits were based on "arbitrary and capricious" figures and asked the FCC to revisit its ownership policies. Justices asked the FCC to provide empirical or analytical evidence that the rules were necessary to protect the public interest.

<u>Executive Opinion:</u> When the FCC set out on its biennial review in 2002, it had the Telecommunications Act and the 3rd Circuit opinions to contend with. Both branches seemed, according to Chairman Michael Powell, to be pushing for deregulation. They were not alone. The executive branch was also a factor in the process. Since taking office in 2001, President George W. Bush supported deregulation in matters relating to

government policy and the marketplace. Clearly, the broadcast industry saw the Bush Administration as an ally in its regulatory struggles. In their letter to shareholders, included in the company's 2000 Annual Report entitled Turning Challenges into Opportunities, retired Gannett Co. Chairman John J. Curley and current Chairman, President & CEO Douglas H. McCorkindale wrote:

> There's a new mood at the FCC and we are hoping to see the end of cross-ownership rules that have so restricted our expansion into a number of markets. Our industry, hamstrung by these unnecessary rules, will seize the many opportunities that will arise when the rules change. (Gannett, 2000, p. 4)

Gannett Co, Incorporated, believed that Bush's election produced a "likely benefit for broadcasting" (Gannett, 2000, p. 4).

A New Mood & New Empirical Evidence: The FCC's Decision

Spurred on by the courts, congress, and a pro-deregulatory political climate, the FCC was faced with the unenviable task of revising its media ownership policies. To gather empirical evidence in support of its review, the Commission created a new division called the Media Ownership Working Group (MOWG). According to Chairman Michael Powell, the group would help the FCC rebuild "the factual foundation of the Commission's media ownership regulations" ("FCC Chairman," 2002). The FCC commissioned the group to conduct twelve empirical studies to help examine the current state of the media marketplace, "including how consumers use the media, how advertisers view the different media outlets, and how media ownership affects diversity, localism and competition" ("FCC Releases," 2002). According to Chairman Powell, the studies, which were conducted by researchers in academia as well as staff members within the FCC, represented "an unprecedented data-gathering effort to better understand market and consumer issues so that we may develop sound public policy" ("FCC Releases," 2002).[7]

After reviewing the studies, holding a public hearing on media ownership policy, and reading public comments filed by more than two million Americans,[8] the FCC issued its new ownership rules in June of 2003 ("FCC sets limits," 2003). Specifically, the FCC:

(1) Raised the so-called **national cap**, allowing one entity to own local television stations that collectively reach up to 45 percent of the U.S. television audience. The previous limit was 35 percent.

(2) Lifted the ban that prevented one company from owning both a television station and newspaper within the same city. The **cross-ownership** rule had been in place since 1975.

(3) Expanded the number of television stations one company can own within a local media "market." The new rules would allow **duopolies** in small and medium-sized television markets (where there are 5 to 17 television stations) as long as both of the combining stations are not among the top four in the ratings. The rules would also allow **tripolies** in larger cities, as long as two of the combining stations are not among the four top-rated stations.

Not all its decisions were deregulatory in nature. The FCC kept intact a rule which banned one company owning more than one of the top four major broadcast networks. The commission also tightened radio ownership rules by redefining what constitutes a radio "market."

[7] For a detailed review of the findings relating to national ownership limits, cross-ownership, and local television ownership, including a methodological and theoretical critique of the studies, see Smith, 2003.

[8] According to the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia, nearly two million people weighed in by letters, postcards, e-mails, and petitions to oppose further relaxation of the rules. This figure was cited in *Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC* (2004), p. 23.

With its decision, the Commission significantly changed the regulatory landscape, allowing increased consolidation of broadcast media ownership across the country and within individual communities. Ironically, the FCC promoted its changes as placing "new limits" on ownership concentration ("FCC Sets Limits," 2003). The FCC concluded the new regulations were carefully balanced to protect diversity, localism, and competition in the American media system. The Commission argued it was protecting the public's interests by ensuring "pro-competitive market structures":

> …. these new broadcast ownership limits will foster a vibrant marketplace of ideas, promote vigorous competition, and ensure that broadcasters continue to serve the needs and interests of their local communities." ("FCC Sets Limits," p. 1).

The decision to further deregulate America's media system was not unanimous, however. The changes were approved in a tight, 3-to-2 vote which fell along party lines: Republicans in favor, Democrats against. According to media reports after the ruling, "both sides claimed they were voting in the public interest and for free speech" (Ahrens, 2003b).

<u>**Political & Judicial Fall-Out Revisited**</u>

Since the Summer of 2003, the FCC's decision has stirred considerable debate, not only between FCC commissioners, but also in Congress, the courts, among journalists, media scholars, and the American public. Originally scheduled to go into effect on September 4, 2003, the new rules are now on hold. On June 22, 2004, the U.S. Senate voted to repeal the FCC's rules and restore the tougher restrictions (Eggerton, 2004a; Labaton, 2004a;). The measure faces formidable political obstacles, however, largely from the Bush Administration and Republican leaders on Capitol Hill (Labaton, 2004a).

More recently, however, came a critical ruling by a panel of judges in the United States Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit in Philadelphia. On June 24, just two days after the senate vote, the appellate court sent the FCC back to the drawing board to rework its ownership rules yet again (Ahrens, 2004a; Eggerton, 2004b; Labaton, 2004b; Lazaroff & Miller, 2004). The court largely found in favor of a coalition of public interest and consumer advocacy groups. Led by an anti-deregulation group called the Prometheus Radio Project, the coalition had argued that the revised ownership regulations could do irreparable harm to local programming.

In *Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC* (2004), the 3rd Circuit took aim at the empirical methods the FCC had used to help set ownership limits (p. 15). In a 2-1 vote, justices found that, for all its efforts, many of the FCC's new limits employ "irrational assumptions and inconsistencies" (p. 58) and that the FCC fell "short of its obligation to justify its decisions to retain, repeal, or modify its media ownership regulations with reasoned analysis" (p. 121). Ironically, like the justices in *Fox v. FCC* and *Sinclair v. FCC,* the court found that many of the FCC's new rules were "arbitrary and capricious" and required re-writing.

The ruling in *Prometheus* is extremely complex and involves a discussion far beyond the scope of this project. Much of the court's decision dealt with issues such as the "public interest standard,"[9] broadcast spectrum scarcity,[10] and the intricate mathematical modeling underlying the FCC's new Diversity Index.[11] Central to the court's opinion, however, was the pressing matter of the FCC's new rules. Overall, the court found the Commission did *not* sufficiently justify its deregulatory decisions for either (1) local television ownership; (2) local radio ownership; or (3) cross-ownership of media within local markets (p. 15). Justices believed the FCC's decision to loosen ownership limits in local media markets was not "adequately supported by the record" (p. 15).

Of particular import to the present research project was the court's ruling regarding the Local Television Ownership Rule. Here, the court found the FCC erred

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[9] The court contested the opinion of pro-deregulation groups that the *1996 Telecommunications Act* all but required the FCC to allow further consolidation unless it could be proven that the rules were "necessary" to preserve the public interest. In its opinion, the court did not accept that the Act's instructions must "operate only as a one-way ratchet" for deregulation (p. 40). Justices adopted a lesser public interest standard – one that allows the regulations to exist (or even be tightened) if they continue to be "useful" in protecting the public interest versus "necessary" (p. 42).

[10] Pro-deregulation groups had argued that the availability of new media options, such as cable and the Internet, rendered the scarcity argument moot. The court found, however, that "(t)he abundance of non-broadcast media does not render the broadcast spectrum any less scarce" (p. 55). Throughout the majority opinion, justices contested the idea that the Internet and cable were a viable source for local news and public affairs programming and seriously questioned the rationale behind the FCC's new regulations.

[11] The Index is a complex mathematical model. The Commission created it as a means of justifying consolidation limits within local markets for both cross-ownership and television ownership. The court found that the Index was based on numerous "irrational assumptions and inconsistencies" (p. 56). A full description of the model can be found in the court's opinion (p. 57-61). First, the FCC counted the number of information providers in each individual market (including Internet sites reachable via cable and broadband). Second, using a national audience survey, the FCC assigned each provider a "relative weight" based on the percentage of people who said they used that medium for news and public affairs information. For example, a national study showed consumers relied most heavily on broadcast TV (at 33.8%). Each station then, was weighted more heavily than, say, daily papers, which surveys show contributed to 20.2% of news and information gathering. Internet sites received considerable weight in the Index despite the fact that many were not local, did not provide an "aggregator" or "distiller" function, or were purely duplicative of local television stations' news content. The court found that giving every Internet site an equal market share was "inconsistent" and made "unrealistic assumptions about media outlets' relative contributions to viewpoint diversity in local markets" (p. 67), creating results that were "absurd" (p. 68) and "arbitrary and capricious" (p. 73). Particularly problematic was the FCC's assumption that the Internet provided information to society when 30% of Americans do not have internet access (p. 60).

when it agreed to allow increased consolidation (duopolies) in small and medium television markets. On this point, Justices ruled in favor of the "Citizen Petitioners" and asked the FCC to re-write its regulations regarding conditions under which future duopolies might be allowed.

The duopoly decision was not absolute, however. In their ruling for the majority, justices Ambro and Fuentes made a critical judgment regarding the perceived benefits of local television consolidation, agreeing that "(c)onsolidation can improve local programming" (p. 81). Specifically, the justices agreed with the FCC that common ownership of television stations can result in "consumer welfare efficiencies" (p. 82). The Commission had argued that, by eliminating redundant expenses, common ownership could "lead to cost savings," which in turn could lead to programming and other service benefits that enhance the public interest" (p. 82). Ambro and Fuentes pointed directly to two empirical studies which were part of the official court proceedings. One study, produced by Owen et al. (2003), found that duopolies were more likely to carry local news than other stations and air a similar quality and quantity of news as other stations (cited on p. 82). Another, conducted by Fratrik (2003), found that consolidation generally improved audience ratings and the financial viability of co-owned stations (cited on p. 82).

Chief Judge Anthony Scirica also relied on these studies in his separate opinion. In constructing its rules, he argued, the Commission rightly focused on "a firm's 'capacity' to deliver programming" (p. 167), a capacity that would likely be enhanced if it could achieve financial efficiencies. Paramount, he argued, was making sure that media owners "have the ability and incentive to offer more programming responsive to the needs and interest of their communities and… in many cases, that is what they do" (p. 165). According to him, efficiencies achieved through common ownership (both duopolies and triopolies) would "enable local broadcasters to better compete with cable and digital providers and would also 'spur the transition to digital television,' which the FCC identified as a goal in the public interest" (p. 164). While he agreed with his fellow judges on the issue of "efficiencies," Scirica disagreed with the court's ultimate decision to remand the rules to the FCC. Scirica felt the FCC had justified every aspect of its new Local Television Ownership Rules (pp. 163-167). Overall, he felt the FCC had made "well-informed predictions" about which types of media markets would best foster public interest goals and argued that the 3rd Circuit was not in a position to interfere with the "expert knowledge" of the FCC (p. 212).

U.S. Media Policy & Unanswered Empirical Questions

In light of *Prometheus v. FCC*, the future of the Commission's media ownership rules is decidedly unclear. Two scenarios are possible. First, the FCC could choose to rewrite and resubmit the rules to the 3rd Circuit in Philadelphia (which expressly maintained jurisdiction on the matter in its opinion)(p. 122). Second, since the opinion of judges in Philadelphia conflicted in many ways with the 3rd Circuit in Washington (in *Fox v. FCC* and *Sinclair v. FCC*), the matter could wind up before the Supreme Court (Eggerton, 2004b; Labaton, 2004b). In the meantime, media companies wishing to buy more broadcast or newspaper properties will have to follow the ownership regulations that were in place before the FCC's most recent ruling.

The 3rd Circuit's decision was a significant setback for the FCC, the White House, the Republican congressional leadership, and many media companies, all of which backed the ownership rules (Ahrens, 2004a). It was particularly disappointing for Commission Chairman Michael Powell. After the ruling, Powell staunchly defended the commission's decisions but admitted that the Commission may have "erred" in trying to pass all of the controversial rules at one time (Ahrens, 2004b). According to Powell, because two of the FCC's decisions actually tightened media regulations, the decision "perversely may make it dramatically more difficult for the commission to protect against greater media consolidation" (Ahrens, 2004a). The court, says Powell, "has created a clouded and confused state of media law" which makes it "nearly impossible" for his agency to design standards of ownership limits (Eggerton & Higgins, 2004; Labaton, 2004b; Lazaroff & Miller, 2004).

Deregulation foes see it differently. Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein, the two Democrats on the FCC, both voted against the revised rules. They perceive the court's decision as a "big win." According to Adelstein, the court "largely undid what would have been the most destructive rollback of media ownership protections in the history of American broadcasting" (Eggerton, 2004b). To Commissioner Copps, not only was the ruling a victory for the American public, it is an opportunity to go back to the drawing board and do a better job. Upon hearing the court's decision, Copps promptly called for the FCC to schedule a new round of public hearings across the country "designed to give citizens access to the decision makers of the Agency" (Eggerton, 2004b).

Copps also sees the ruling as an opportunity to gather critical empirical evidence. He disagrees with Powell's contention that the court's ruling makes sound policy impossible, arguing that new and better studies will help guide the FCC in the right direction: "If you do credible studies … it's not hard. It's not rocket science. Now is not the time to throw our hands up" (Labaton, 2004b). Specifically, Copps says the FCC needs "independent research studies on media concentration in a variety of markets so that we can make a decision that has more solid foundation. Clearly, the court found that the FCC's previous studies were inadequate and lacked credibility" (Eggerton, 2004b). Andrew Jay Schwartzman agrees. As President of the Media Access Project, Schwartzman was the central litigator for the "Citizen Petitioners" in the *Prometheus* case. The court's ruling, he says, "gives us the chance to prove that these limitations are necessary for local civic discourse" (Schwartzman, 2004).

The Status of Empirical Evidence

In *Prometheus v. FCC*, justices cite just two studies relating to the Local Television Ownership Rule. That fact is illustrative of a larger problem – a dearth of empirical research on the subject of local ownership consolidation (duopolies). In large part, the absence of research can be attributed to the relative newness of the phenomenon. In 1999, the FCC first began allowing one company to own two television stations in the same media market. In addition to chronological realities, methodological difficulties also contribute to the lack of credible research. Industrial analyses are notoriously difficult to conduct, especially when illusive concepts such as diversity and localism are concerned (Gomery, 2001; Napoli, 2001; Sinha & Stein, 1995).

To date, this author has located only seven studies which directly measure or examine the local television ownership consolidation (Chambers, 2003; Chambers, Reeves, & Harp, 2001; Cooper, 2003; Fratrik, 2003; Owen, Mikkelsen, Mortimer, & Baumann, 2003; Roberts, Frenette, & Stearns, 2002; Singleton & Rockwell, 2003). In the following pages, the research will be reviewed and significant gaps in the literature identified. To provide a framework for this empirical review, I refer once again to Napoli's discussion of diversity and localism (2001). According to Napoli, diversity, as a policy objective, has historically been defined in three ways: (1) Source Diversity; (2) Content Diversity; and (3) Exposure Diversity. I use the first two categories to organize the applicable literature.[12]

Source ("Outlet") Diversity

Source Diversity involves counting the number of outlets and owners producing media content. Historically, it has been assumed that diverse content will naturally arise

[12] Exposure Diversity refers to the different types of media outlets (broadcast, print, cable, internet, satellite) available to and/or utilized by consumers/citizens. Research in this area involves, for example, an analysis of the variety of media options in a given local community. Studies of "substitution" or "media voices" would be included in this category. As it is outside the target of this research project, exposure diversity will not be addressed in the present analysis.

through a diversity of owners and operators (Napoli).[13] To date, no empirical research has been published which directly examines the impact of the 1999 rule change on the number of television news outlets and or owners in local television markets. One study points peripherally to the ways in which deregulation helps struggling television stations survive in competitive media markets, thereby promoting source diversity (Fratrik, 2003). Another suggests source diversity is alive and well in the United States, based on the dramatic increase in the number of local broadcast outlets in recent years (Roberts et al., 2002). Of concern to many, however, is research which shows deregulation has led to a decrease in the number of unique owners producing media content (Chambers, 2003; Cooper, 2003; Singleton & Rockwell, 2003). Each of these studies will now be described in detail.

Station Viability: There is research to suggest that local television ownership consolidation may contribute to source diversity. In *Television Local Marketing Agreements and Local Duopolies: Do they generate new competition and diversity* (2003), Mark Fratrik evaluated television stations that were either co-owned or co-managed in seven small or medium television markets.[14] He compared ratings and revenues at each station before and after they entered such agreements. He found the stations were able to significantly improve on both counts. On average, the stations' share of viewers increased by 3.2 points and advertising revenues rose by more than

[13] According to Napoli, a diverse workforce is also a component of "Source Diversity."

[14] An LMA is a condition under which one station owner manages operations for another station within the same city. The stations are not co-owned. The concept is similar to "Joint Operating Agreements" in the newspaper industry. Fratrik examined seven stations owned or operated by LIN Television and Raycom Media. His was one of two studies directly cited by the court in *Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC.*

250%.[15] When compared to "similarly situated" stations in other markets, all seven stations financially "outperformed" their peers (p. 1). Fratrik contends that, through LMA or duopoly arrangements, increased revenues and cost-savings can be realized which, in turn, can help stations purchase additional programming, add valuable services (such as digital signals and other technological advancements), and make it possible for struggling stations to survive (p. 2).

Outlets & Ownership: There is also research to show that source diversity is strong across the United States, particularly in local television. In 2002, Roberts, Frenette and Stearns compared availability and ownership of media outlets in ten different media markets over three different points of time: 1960, 1980, and 2000.[16] For each year, they counted all media providers in the markets (including commercial and non-commercial broadcast outlets, cable systems, direct broadcast satellite systems, and daily newspapers) as well as the unique owners across all media. The authors found the number of broadcast media outlets (both radio and television) increased "dramatically" between 1960 and 2000. They also found, however, that the number of owners remained "relatively static" in the last twenty years (p. 2). They attribute the stasis to tremendous ownership consolidation, especially in the radio industry (as a result of the 1996 Telecom Act).

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[15] A "share" is the percentage of people watching *that* station versus those watching other stations in the television market.

[16] Their study was one of twelve conducted by the FCC's Media Ownership Working Group project for the Third Biennial Review.

Chambers found similar results in his examination of small media markets (2003).[17] He studied structural changes in broadcast, radio, and print newspapers among communities with a population of 125,000 or less. 52 were included in his analysis. Chambers discovered the number of broadcast outlets had risen 61% between 1972 and 1998. He also found, however, that the number of owners failed to keep pace, rising only 54% in the same time period (p. 50). Like Roberts et al., he found the proportion of broadcast owners decreased notably after the FCC deregulated radio. Because Chambers data measured outlets and owners until 1998, the impact of deregulation on television outlets and ownership was not analyzed in this study.

Although Roberts et al. and Chambers focused on the number of media outlets and owners, and Fratrik studied television outlets' financial viability, none of these studies examined whether any of these outlets actually provided news and/or public affairs programming – arguably a critical content area in the study of deregulation and the public interest. Fratrik's study suffers from the same omission. He concluded that further deregulation could help maintain or increase the number of local television outlets as well as their ability to provide "another strong voice to their communities" (p. 1). While such an outcome was possible, Fratrik did not provide evidence that any of the stations he studied had *actually used* their additional resources to generate any kind of local programming.

[17] Chambers tracked the number of stations and owners in those markets between 1972 and 1998 (in four year intervals).

In fact, several researchers have found that deregulation in U.S. media policy has led directly to a *decrease* in news and public affairs programming, even among commercial, financially viable television stations. According to Singleton and Rockwell (2003), a substantial number of stations in the nation's fifty largest U.S. television markets do not regularly schedule local news or public affairs programming. This, in effect, makes the stations "silent voices" instead of "strong" voices for the communities they serve (p. 1). According to McKean and Stone (1992), content deregulation in the 1980s led many television stations to drop local news. Similarly, Bishop and Hakanen (2002) found that, when not expressly required by media regulations to air specific content, television owners regularly discontinue producing public affairs programming, which can be costly to produce and often achieves low ratings. All these researchers contend that a simple count of outlets is insufficient when it comes to examining deregulation's impact on source diversity and favor, instead, the examination of content diversity.

Content Diversity: Programming

Content diversity involves the examination of specific format and program types produced by various media providers. It is assumed that, through content diversity, a variety of ideas and opinions will emerge and local needs will be addressed. One way to study content diversity is to examine the variety of programming types and formats provided by media outlets and owners. Very little empirical research has been conducted on the subject of local television ownership consolidation and programming content, however. Between two studies conducted on the matter, the findings are mixed.

Empirical evidence supporting further duopoly deregulation comes from Owen et al. (2003). In this study, the authors examined the effect of common ownership or operation on local television news. They compared programming of stations that are commonly owned (duopolies) or co-operated (LMAs) with stations that are not co-owned or co-operated. Controlling for factors such as network affiliation, market size, and the number of TV competitors, the authors discovered that co-owned or operated stations were significantly more likely to carry local news than other stations (p. 2). While they were more likely to *carry* news, these stations were not more likely to carry *more* news than their competitors.[18] The authors concluded that the presence of a "same-market station group" (duopoly or LMA) neither significantly increased nor significantly decreased the availability of news programming to the local community (p. 10), implying that deregulation of ownership within local television markets does not have deleterious effects.

Cooper disagrees with that contention and offers evidence to the contrary. He argues that consolidation researchers like Owen frequently fail to incorporate critical information into the research design – namely the status of news before the purchase took place. By not inquiring as to whether stations "added news after a duopoly was created or merely bought stations that already produced news," he claims such research is often

[18] Using regression analysis, Owen et al. found that the total minutes of local news carried by co-owned or co-operated stations is similar to that of stations that are not co-owned or co-operated. The study only involved full-power commercial broadcast stations. It is unknown whether the inclusion of low-power stations would have produced different results.

flawed (p. 138). To prove his point, Cooper re-examined duopoly data provided by FOX and NBC as part of the FCC's biennial review. He found that in *no* case did either of these companies actually add news to a station that did not already carry it and, in one case, eliminated the news at a duopoly station (p. 138).

According to Cooper, more critical than the amount of news produced is the fact that same-market combinations actually led to a decrease in the number of *independent* news producers in the market. Even if duopolies were more likely than their competitors to broadcast local news, Cooper contends that "the loss of independent hours of news in duopoly markets exceeds the gain in the total hours of news in those markets" (p. 137). In other words, he argues, "we get a little more quantity at a severe loss to quality," when quality is measured by independent hours of news.

Content Diversity: Newscast Quality

If pure programming diversity does not provide a complete answer to deregulation questions, what might? According to Napoli (2001), content diversity should be defined not only in terms of program types but in terms of diversity of viewpoints presented within those programs (p. 3). Those who conduct industrial analyses refer to this area as "performance" evaluation (Allen & Gomery, 1985; Gomery, 2001; Scherer, 1980). It is in the examination of performance where issues of content "quality" frequently arise. Two research projects provide evidence that the quality of news programming can be maintained through local ownership consolidation.

Measuring Performance through Awards: Owen et al. (2003) compared the "quality" of co-owned (duopolies) or co-operated (LMAs) news operations with those that were not co-owned or operated. As opposed to examining actual content, the authors used awards as a proxy for quality in their study, counting the number of awards given to stations by the Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) in 2001 and 2002. The authors found that co-owned stations won virtually the same number of awards. They concluded that common ownership or operation does not significantly affect news quality (p. 10). The 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals cited this research as proof that "(c)onsolidation can improve local programming" (*Prometheus v. FCC*, p. 81).

Using awards as a way of assessing relative performance is highly problematic. It is not, however, without precedent. Spavins et al. (2002) also counted awards in their examination of cross-ownership and national ownership limits, which they conducted for the FCC's Third Biennial Review (MOWG Study #7). These authors argued that industry practitioners, by applying detailed knowledge of their craft, are often in the best position to identify excellence in the awards process. Although this is a solid argument, awards do not simply arrive at the doorstep. Stations must first submit content for consideration. Financial and cultural considerations play a significant role in this process. First, in most cases, it costs money to submit award entries. Second, someone must be paid (or given time) to coordinate and submit the station’s entries. Last, many stations (and ownership groups) simply do not value awards, so they don’t enter. In addition, the process can be political. Certain employees or news units frequently are favored over others when it comes time to consider award submissions. Given that the presence or absence of awards is defined by exogenous variables, this measure is problematic. Spavins et al. admit this shortcoming. They point out that awards are, at best, an "imperfect prox(y) for what we seek to measure."[19] Despite clear problems, still, Owen et al. appeared to believe awards were a sound method of examining content.

Measuring Performance through Content Analysis: To date, only one study has been identified that directly addresses the issue of local consolidation on actual news content and it has yet to be published. Chambers et al. (2001) examined *Story Duplication in New Television News Management Models*. The authors hypothesized that stations involved in "shared-service agreements," (or LMAs) where one station produces news for another station, will have a higher degree of story duplication that stations not involved in the shared-service agreements (p. 8). Taking a case study approach, they analyzed newscasts from two media markets – a "small market in the Southwest and a medium-sized market in the Southeast" (p. 8). Using individual stories as their unit of analysis, they coded each story for the following: story order (placement in the newscast), story length, geographic origin of the story, story format, story sources, story topic and story type. Then, using a scheme developed by Atwater (1984; 1986), they compared the content to see how much "consonance" or "story duplication" there was between stations. The authors found that stations *not* involved in joint ventures duplicated their stories about half (50%) of the time. Story duplication among stations involved in joint ventures was higher, however, at 57%. On the remaining variables,

[19] The authors also used ratings as a means of measuring quality. For a detailed discussion of their study and its implications for deregulation, see Smith (2003).

however, the authors found that joint venture stations often produce different "looking" products so as to "brand" themselves differently in the local market.

Consolidation, Competition, & Content: Empirical Evidence in Print and Broadcast

This author was able to find only one study which directly examined the impact of local television ownership consolidation on actual news content (Chambers et al., 2001). On this subject, an "empirical vacuum" exists (Napoli, 2001, p. 3). Part of the problem is that it is extremely difficult to isolate the effects of ownership and market structures (Sinha & Stein, 1995). According to Sinha and Stein, while there is compelling evidence to suggest ownership concentration negatively impacts ideological diversity and programming choices in both entertainment and news media (p. 5), many factors can overshadow such analyses, including the size of the market, its demographic characteristics, the extent of commercialization, professional values, and government control (p. 4). Additionally, diversity, as a concept is notoriously difficult to define and measure.

As the 3rd Circuit Court pointed out in *Prometheus*, however, efforts to gauge the impact of policy *must* be made, even when "elusive" and "not easily defined" areas such as programming diversity in broadcasting is involved (*Prometheus*, p. 31). While there is little evidence on the impact of ownership consolidation on content within local markets, there are many studies which point to the ways in which the subject might be fruitfully examined, especially regarding the impact of competition and ownership consolidation on diversity and localism in news and public affairs programming content.[20]

Consolidation, Decreasing Competition & Content: Newspaper Research

For decades, researchers have studied the impact of decreasing competition on local news content and quality. In print journalism, the issue has attracted researchers since the 1940s, when the number of competing dailies began to dwindle (Bigman, 1948; Nixon & Jones, 1956). Research in this area blossomed in the late-1980s, however, in the work of scholars like McCombs (1987; 1988) and Lacy (1988; 1989). According to McCombs, "traditional assumptions in democratic political theory about competition and the diversity of news and opinion in the marketplace need(ed) to be examined more rigorously" (1988, p. 129). He and other researchers set out to replace "social rhetoric" with empirical evidence.

Competition & Print Content: McCombs studied newspapers from Cleveland (1987) to Canada (1988). In both cases, he compared the content that was produced by competing dailies to the content that was produced by monopoly newspapers. Specifically, he wondered whether the presence of competing media resulted in significant message diversity and whether the disappearance of competition resulted in significant content changes (1987, p. 741). To examine the changes, he measured variables such as the range of topics, the geographical focus, and the amount of locally-

[20] There is also a substantial body of research addressing the impact of competition and consolidation on entertainment programming and advertising. See, for example, Albaran, 2002; Allen & Gomery, 1985; Brown & Williams, 2002; Bush, 2002; Compaine & Gomery, 2000; Cunningham & Alexander, 2002; Einstein, 2002; Einstein, 2004; Future of Music Coalition, 2002; Huntemann, 1999; National Association of Broadcasters, 2003; Sinha & Stein, 1995; Turow, 1997; Williams, Brown & Alexander, 2002; Williams & Roberts, 2002).

produced content (versus information provided via wire services). He used three sets of data in each city: (1) Newspaper A – before its demise; (2) Newspaper B – before A's demise; and (3) Newspaper B – after A's demise. With the exception of some minor differences, he found that the presence or absence of competition did not greatly affect the scope of topics, the geographic emphasis, or the amount of wire versus staff-produced material (1987, p. 743; 1988). Instead of competition driving diverse content, he found the newspapers were generally "rivals in conformity." His findings, he argued, rebutted the argument that "the demise of a competitor will be followed by diminished quality" (1988, p. 136).

Lacy found something different. In one study, he measured the allocation of news space, editorial space, and resources among 114 different newspapers (1988). Using regression analysis, he found that the more intense the competition, the more the newspapers sought to differentiate themselves in hopes of retaining readers. This was particularly true for smaller, suburban papers competing against larger metropolitan dailies. The smaller, less dominant paper frequently responded to competition by expanding the amount of news they provided and focusing more on locally-generated stories (1988, p. 405). Lacy later generated a mathematical modeling system to demonstrate the benefits of intercity competition to quality in areas such as depth of coverage, completeness, fairness and balance, accuracy, and the usefulness of content to readers (1989, p. 48).

There are other ways to measure the impact of newspaper competition on news and quality. Everett and Everett (1989) wanted to know whether declining competition led to reduced quality and diversity of editorial content. Instead of examining actual content, they created an "indicator" of quality (a ratio) that divided the total amount of newsprint produced (in tons) by the paper's cost to readers. They found that, pound for pound, consumers in purely competitive markets (versus monopoly markets) received a higher quality product. They hypothesized that *more* meant *better*.

Ownership & Print Content: In newspapers, quality has also been studied in association with ownership consolidation. This refers to the number of local papers being purchased by larger ownership groups. Empirical evidence on the effects of consolidation in newspapers is mixed. According to Busterna, Hansen, and Ward (1991), neither competitive conditions nor chain ownership had a significant impact on the allocation of resources to a paper as measured by the size of news and library staffs, the number of wire services, the number of databases taken, and money spent on monthly research. To the contrary, Lacy (1991) found group ownership could lead to a larger news staff and a greater financial commitment to the newspapers. Lacy also found, however, that group-owned papers devoted less space to editorial and news copy than non-group-owned papers (p. 44). In his study of newspaper quality, Coulson (1994) discovered group-ownership had both positive and negative effects. His study was based, however, on the perceptions of journalists and editors as opposed to actual content or resource measures.[21] More recently, Lacy and Blanchard (2003) found that papers owned by publicly-held companies made higher profits than privately held dailies but had

[21] Becker, Beam, and Russial (1978) also found group ownership could improve performance. Like Coulson's study, however, their work relied upon surveys (perceptions about the newspapers' editorial policies and practices) as opposed to news content.

smaller newsroom staffs. The workers in publicly-held companies, however, had higher starting salaries.

None of the preceding studies directly examined content. Two case studies delve into the subject. Coulson and Hansen (1995) examined the *Louisville Courier-Journal*'s news content after it was purchased by Gannett Co., Inc. Their study found that, after the purchase, the average length of stories dropped, hard news coverage declined, and wire service stories increased, negatively affecting localism. Taking a somewhat different approach, Gilens and Hertzman (2000) examined a single issue across several newspapers. Specifically, they wanted to know how the issue of television ownership deregulation was being covered by the press. They found what they called "systematic bias" on the part of corporate news groups. Newspapers run by companies that stood to gain (financially) from the proposed loosening of TV ownership rules offered their readers favorable coverage of the proposed changes whereas groups that did not stand to gain financially provided overwhelmingly unfavorable coverage (p. 383). Gilens and Hertzman determined that corporate ownership significantly influenced not only the newspaper editorials on the subject but its news reporting as well (p. 383).

Consolidation, Competition & Content: Broadcast News Research

While print research on consolidation and competition began in the 1940s, similar research into broadcast content began in earnest in the 1970s. Of particular interest to scholars such as Lemert (1974), Litman (1978) and Nestvold (1973) was the diversity of content in network and local news. Since those early studies, the amount of research examining broadcast media structure, content, and performance has virtually exploded, largely due to substantial deregulation of the broadcast airwaves in the 1980s.

Competition & Television News Content: Much like print research, broadcast scholarship has focused on the diversity of content provided by competing television stations. And like McCombs (1978; 1988), the majority of these studies show competing stations are largely "rivals in conformity." To date, Chambers et al (2001) are the only researchers to examine diversity of content in conjunction with ownership consolidation in local markets. Their work, detailed above, was influenced heavily by others who had done significant research on the concept of "consonance" in local television news (Atwater, 1984; Atwater, 1986; Carroll, Tuggle, McCollum, Mitrook, Arlington, & Hoerner, 1997; Davie & Lee, 1993). The majority of consonance studies compare topic diversity, geographic diversity, the source of content (such as wires versus locally-produced material) between competing stations.

On two occasions, Atwater studied the diversity of topics and amount of time dedicated to news stories. He found approximately 50% of news stories were the same (or similar) on competing stations and that stations spent approximately half of their available time airing similar stories. Atwater also found that the "harder" the story, the more likely it was to be "unique" to a station (1984). He also discovered that spot news and scheduled news events (e.g., press conferences), crime/courts, accidents & disasters, and government/politics that included such news events were most likely to show high levels of duplication (1986).

Davie and Lee (1993) advanced Atwater's work in their study, *Television news technology: Do more sources mean less diversity?* They found 56% of stories on local newscasts were similar. They believe the increase in duplicated stories, compared to Atwater's 50%, can be explained (at least in part) through technological advancements. As stations gain access to more national feed and satellite sources/services, consonance rises. In fact, they found news stories provided by network sources had the highest percentage of similarity, while unique stories were usually supplied by local sources. Carroll et al. (1997) reached a similar conclusion in their analysis, finding the farther the geographic origin of the story from the market, the higher the level of consonance.

<u>Ownership & Television News Content:</u> On the subject of ownership consolidation and news content, anecdotal and qualitative evidence abounds (See, for example, Bagdikian, 1997; McChesney, 1997; McManus, 1994). Empirical evidence, however, is much harder to come by. The work of a single organization stands out as the most comprehensive research on the subject. In 2003, the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), which is affiliated with Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, released a report which analyzed the impact of ownership and ownership consolidation on the quality of local television news content (PEJ, 2003). The ownership research was conducted to help the FCC in its policy-making process. The findings will be addressed shortly. But first, a review of the study's method is in order.

The data used by PEJ for this particular study was not collected for the express purpose of studying ownership and its influence on content. Researchers at PEJ had been gathering and examining local television newscasts for five years. Theirs was the largest examination ever undertaken of local television news in the United States. Their goal was to deconstruct what local TV news offers citizens (2003, p. 1). Throughout the years, PEJ had collected 172 distinct news programs, including some 23,000 stories, from local television news stations across America.

Originally, the data were collected to examine questions of news quality. As for what accounts for "quality" news, PEJ relied on the opinions of local television journalists. Quality stations were defined as those who: (1) covered a wide range of topics; (2) covered stories which were significant and informative – as well as interesting; (3) covered stories in-depth, with context, showing initiative, and demonstrating "enterprise" or original reporting; (4) spoke with a wide array of sources; (5) included a variety of perspectives and positions on stories; (6) spoke with credible, authoritative sources; and (6) covered stories which reflected the community's interests and held relevance to local citizens and diverse demographic groups (PEJ, 2001; PEJ, 2002, Rosenstiel et al., 1999, p. 84, Rosenstiel et al., 2000).

Using newscasts gathered over a five-year span, PEJ re-analyzed the data for use by the FCC in the media ownership review. Researchers made four key findings (p.1):

1) Smaller station groups overall tended to producer higher quality newscasts than stations owned by larger companies – by a significant margin.

2) Network affiliated stations tended to produce higher quality newscasts than network owned and operated stations – also by a large margin.

3) Stations with cross-ownership (in which the parent company also owns a newspaper in the same market) tended to produce higher quality newscasts.

4) Local ownership offered little protection against newscasts being very poor, and did not produce superior quality.

Taken together, PEJ found that regulations which encourage heavy concentration of ownership in local television by a few large corporations will erode the quality of news Americans receive (p. 2). Although PEJ's report says its researchers examined duopolies, no findings on the subject of local television ownership consolidation were reported (2003, p. 3).

Summary of Empirical Research

Since the 1970s, considerable research has been conducted on the impact of competition and ownership on the broadcast media. The findings are largely mixed. Some studies find competition improves quality, some find it has no effect, and others find competition decreases quality. Some studies show group-ownership improves quality while others find ownership consolidation hampers quality.

The majority of studies which examine the impact of ownership consolidation on news quality have focused on consolidation nationwide. Very little empirical research is available, however, on the issue of local television ownership consolidation. This is largely due to the fact that, until 1999, FCC rules and regulations made it illegal for one company to own more than one station within the same media market. When the rule changed in 1999, a new opportunity for research arose.

Since then, only a handful of researchers have directly measured or examined local consolidation (Chambers, 2003; Cooper, 2003; Fratrik, 2003; Owen et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2002; Singleton & Rockwell, 2003). What has been done deals predominantly with source and programming diversity. To date, this author has located only one study which investigates the impact of local television ownership consolidation on actual newscast content and it has yet to be published. Conducted by Chambers et al. (2001), the study focused primarily on story duplication (or consonance). The authors found that stations involved in joint ventures aired the same (or similar) stories more often than stations not involved in joint ventures.

In the five years since the FCC adopted new rules on local television ownership, dozens of duopolies have sprung up across the United States. The issue is ripe for a more detailed examination – an examination that could help provide much-needed evidence in America's current media ownership policy debate. The present study will contribute such evidence. The goal of this author is to examine the ways in which media ownership policy in the United States in general, and consolidation in particular, impacts the content of local television news.

CHAPTER 5:
Consolidation and Local TV News Content: A Case Study

How does media consolidation affect the quality of local television news content? To date, this question has gone largely unanswered by researchers. Having examined the theoretical and methodological issues in previous consolidation studies, this research project contributes new empirical data to the discussion of media ownership policy in the United States. With few exceptions, previous consolidation studies have focused on the impact of consolidation on the number of media outlets and diversity of sources available to the viewing, listening, and reading public. Fewer still have looked squarely at the impact of ownership consolidation on local (broadcast) television news. Perhaps most importantly, this author found no studies which directly examined local television news content generated under so-called "duopoly" conditions. The present study seeks to fill that research gap by examining the impact of such consolidation on local television news content in one American city.

Historic Changes & Opportunities

The lack of empirical data on the issue of consolidation and news content is not surprising. Historical realities have combined with methodological and theoretical issues to delay such an examination. For decades, U.S. media policy forbade any individual or company from owning more than one television station in the same local market but in

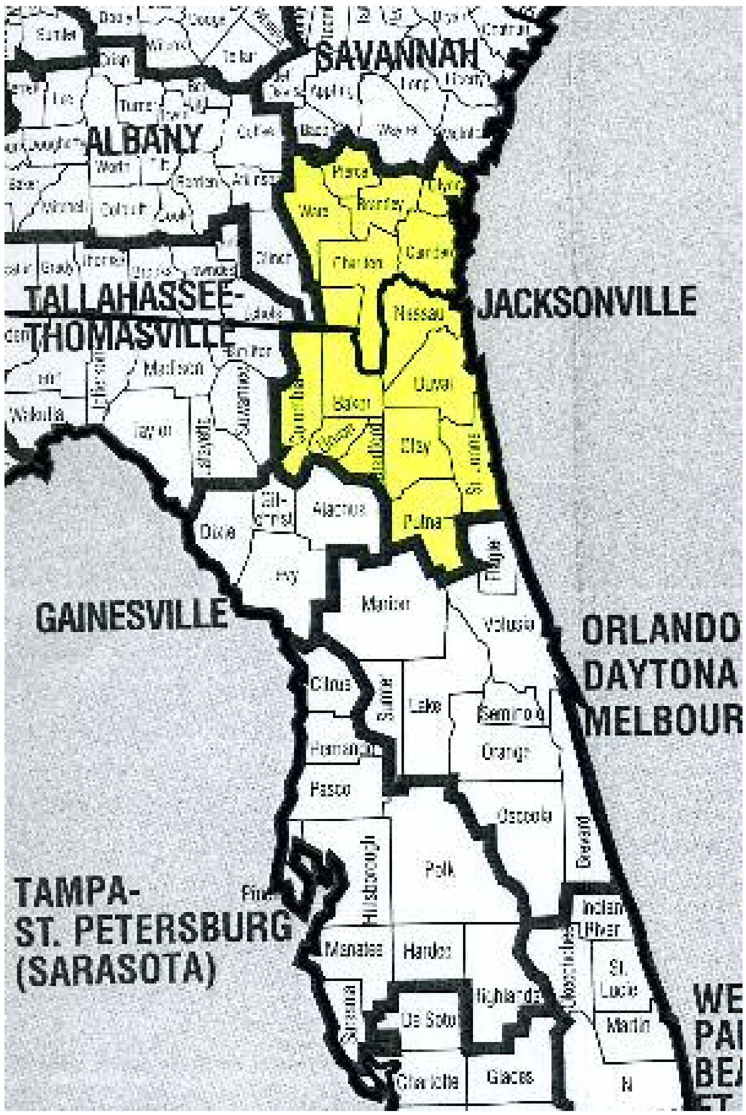
1999, the "Local Television Ownership" Rule changed. Companies became eligible to own two stations (called a duopoly) in the same media market if: (1) the station being purchased was not within the top four in the ratings; and (2) at least eight independently owned broadcast stations remained in the market after the purchase was complete. In 2003, the FCC further relaxed those standards, allowing duopolies, and some cases triopolies, in even more media markets across America (McConnell, 2003).

Gannett Co., Incorporated was one of the first companies in the United States to take advantage of the relaxed rules (Gordon, 1999). On November 16, 1999, company executives announced plans to purchase an ABC affiliate in Jacksonville, Florida. Under normal conditions, such an acquisition might make for a few inches of copy in the local paper's business section. In this case, however, the announcement made headlines (Basch, 1999; Daniels, 1999; Gordon, 1999; Harrell, 2000; Patton, 1999a; Patton, 1999b). Gannett Co., Inc. already owned the NBC affiliate (WTLV) in the same market. On March 1, 2000, it gained ownership of the ABC affiliate (WJXX) as well.

The "Market" in Question

To fully understand the sale and its significance, it is important to understand the media "market" in question. According to Nielsen Media Research, the Jacksonville Designated Market Area (or DMA) spans the Florida/Georgia border. The following map demonstrates the market's geographical boundaries (Figure 1). Fifteen counties are included in the DMA, including nine in Florida (Duval, Clay, Nassau, St. Johns, Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Putnam and Union) and six in Georgia (Brantley, Camden, Charlton, Glynn, Pierce and Ware).

Figure 5:1
Jacksonville/Brunswick Designated Market Area (DMA) Map



Source: Nielsen Media Research

According to Nielsen, Jacksonville is a medium-sized market with approximately 600,000 households using television. Of 210 DMAs in the United States, Jacksonville is ranked 52nd.

Jacksonville is much more than a media "market," however. It has a long and storied history and is home to nearly 1.5 million people. Some who live there refer to the region as the "The First Coast." The designation is an historic reference to the nation's first official city. Spanish explorers established St. Augustine, in St. Johns County, in 1565, making it the oldest, permanent European settlement on the North American coast. That's more than forty years before the English colony at Jamestown (1607) and fifty-five years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock (1620).

Demographics

Census data from the year 2000 show that, combined, the fifteen counties in the DMA cover nearly 8,800 square miles – roughly the size of New Jersey. By far, Jacksonville is the largest city in the region (both in land mass and population). Located in Duval County, Florida, nearly half (735,617) of the region's residents live within the city limits.

Duval County is also home to one of the most diverse populations in the area. Approximately 66% of its residents are white, 28% are black or African American and nearly 3% are Asian. About 4% fall into "other" categories (American Indian and Alaska native, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, some other race, or two or more races). The number of African Americans living in Duval County is more than double the national average. When collecting census data, the U.S. government does not consider Hispanic/Latino to be a racial designation; however, census figures show approximately 4% of Jacksonville's residents are of this ethnicity – about one-third of the U.S. national average (of 12.5%).

Much like the U.S. population, for the most part, the region is split evenly along gender lines. Median income in the region ranges from a high of $50,099 in St. Johns County, Florida to a low of $27,869 in Charlton County, Georgia. In Duval County, approximately 29% of the population has graduated from high school (or earned a completion degree), 32% have some college, 15% have bachelor's degrees, and nearly 7% have completed a master's degree, professional degree, or doctorate. (For a county-by-county breakdown of U.S. census data, both geographic and demographic, see Appendix A and B.)

The DMA's Largest City

Physically, Jacksonville is the largest city in the contiguous United States. At more than 750 square miles, the city is geographically and environmentally diverse, traversing woods, rivers and springs to the West, rich farming land to the south, and marshland and beaches on the Atlantic coast. Jacksonville is home to a major industrial port, financial and insurance industries, and a large, military complex. The U.S. navy runs operations from two bases – Naval Air Station Jacksonville and the amphibious base at Mayport. Mayport is the third-largest naval facility in the continental United States and is home to more than twenty ships, including the aircraft carrier, USS John F. Kennedy.

Ten television stations and nearly 40 radio stations (22 FM, 16 AM) are currently licensed to broadcast on the public airwaves in the Jacksonville DMA. Six of the television stations are operated by commercial broadcasters inside the city limits (Table 1). The other four are either part of the Public Broadcasting System, produce religious programming, or are located in Georgia (which is part of the Jacksonville/Brunswick media market).

Chart 5:1
Jacksonville/Brunswick Designated Market Area (DMA)

Station	**Channel**	**Affiliate**	**Owner**
Commercial Stations:			
WTLV*	12	NBC	Gannett
WJXX*	25	ABC	Gannett
WJXT	4	Independent	Post-Newsweek
WTEV*	47	CBS	Clear Channel
WAWS*	30	FOX/UPN	Clear Channel
WJWB	17	WB	Media General
Public & Georgia Stations:			
WJCT	7	PBS	Public
WJEB	59	Religious	Jacksonville Educators Broadcasting, Inc.
WPXC	21 – GA	PAX-TV	Paxson
WXGA	8 – GA	PBS	Public

Note: (*) represents duopoly ownership.

Jacksonville's primary newspaper is the Florida Times Union. Morris Communications (based in Augusta, GA) owns the paper and, according to the company's website, it has a circulation of approximately 250,000 readers.

Anatomy of a Sale

As Chart 1 reflects, Gannett Co., Inc. currently owns two television stations in the Jacksonville market and Clear Channel Communications owns two TV stations. However, in 1999, when this particular research project began, FCC rules banned such ownership consolidation in local television markets. As noted above, that rule changed in November of 1999 and Gannett executives immediately seized the opportunity to buy a competing station within the Jacksonville market.

Although Gannett already owned WTLV-TV, on November 16, 1999, the company announced that, pending FCC approval, it would purchase a competitor, WJXX-TV, the ABC affiliate which was owned by Allbritton Communications. The story did not begin with this announcement, however; the story of the duopoly began a few years prior to the purchase. The timeline in Chart 2 outlines the events leading up to Gannett's purchase of the ABC affiliate and creation of the duopoly.

The story of the sale actually began in 1996 when the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) cancelled its contract with Jacksonville affiliate, WJKS, which left viewers in the region without an ABC affiliate. Soon thereafter, Allbritton Communications purchased a television station in Southeast Georgia called WBSG-TV.

The station had been on the air since 1989 and doing local news since 1992. Because of its geographic location and city of license (Brunswick, Georgia), WBSG was technically a part of the Jacksonville/Brunswick DMA. One year later, the FCC gave Allbritton permission to operate a second station in the market – a station that was closer to the DMA's center.[22] WJXX would be Jacksonville's new ABC affiliate.

Chart 5:2
Consolidation Timeline in Jacksonville, Florida
WJXX & WTLV

Date:	**Event of Record:**
Feb., 1996	ABC cancels contract with local ABC affiliate, WJKS. ABC is left without a Jacksonville affiliate.
April, 1996	Allbritton Communications buys WBSG-TV in Brunswick, GA.
Feb., 1997	Allbritton receives FCC license for WJXX and puts new ABC affiliate on the air in Jacksonville. Operating agreement allows Allbritton to run ABC programming on WJXX (in Jacksonville) and WBSG (in Georgia).
Aug., 1997	WJXX begins broadcasting local news magazine program at 7pm.
Dec., 1997	Allbritton moves into new facility in Jacksonville and begins doing regularly-scheduled newscasts from this location.
1998	Allbritton drops local news at WBSG-TV (Georgia)
Nov., 1999	FCC changes Local Television Ownership rule. Gannett Co., Incorporated announces plans to purchase WJXX.
March, 2000	FCC approves purchase of WJXX by Gannett. WTLV and WJXX become first duopoly in Jacksonville DMA.
May, 2000	First Coast News is created, a new "combined" newscast which broadcasts simultaneously on WJXX and WTLV.
Dec, 2000	Allbritton sells WBSG to Paxson Communications. Paxson changes station's call letters to WPXC.

[22] The FCC allowed Allbritton to own two stations in the same market because both WJXX and WBSG were UHF stations (Channel 25 and Channel 21 respectively). Also, both stations had a limited broadcast range due to signal strength from their two towers. The FCC granted Allbritton permission to operate on Channel 25/WJXX, which was licensed for use in Orange Park, Florida (near Jacksonville). At the time Allbritton secured broadcast rights, the signal was not being used.

In February of 1997, Allbritton put WJXX on the air but due to poor signal quality and reception issues, especially in Southeast Georgia, the company made arrangements to simulcast ABC programming on both WJXX (in Florida) and WBSG (in Georgia). Although no local news was broadcast on WJXX, local news production did continue on WBSG in Georgia.

Ten months later, Allbritton launched a local news operation out of a newly-constructed, state-of-the-art facility near downtown Jacksonville, a facility estimated to cost between \$6 and \$10 million dollars (Patton, 1999a).[23] Newsroom managers, producers, photographers, editors, reporters, and anchors were hired from around the country to gather news – and to compete with the two news leaders in the market. It would be an uphill battle. WTLV (NBC) and WJXT (CBS) had been producing news in Jacksonville since the 1950s.

According to newsroom personnel at WJXX, Allbritton managers made a five-year commitment to the new news operation (Harrell, 2000). Less than two years later, however, the situation changed. On the morning of November 17, 1999, staff meetings were held simultaneously at both WTLV and WJXX to announce that, subject to FCC approval, Gannett would be purchasing WJXX from Allbritton.[24] In the WTLV studios,

[23] Shortly after it launched its operation in Jacksonville, Allbritton dropped local news altogether at WBSG in Georgia. The company, however, maintained a commitment to its viewers in that portion of the DMA. While it may seem somewhat confusing to include here, the importance of WBSG-TV cannot be overlooked in the current study. The relevance will be established in detail shortly.

[24] WBSG in Georgia was not part of Gannett's purchase plan. Not long after it sold WJXX to Gannett, Allbritton also sold its Georgia station, WBSG-TV, to Paxson Communications. Allbritton was entirely out of the Jacksonville/Brunswick media market.

Gannett corporate executives outlined details of the plan.[25] WTLV employees were told that two separate broadcast towers and signals would be maintained. WJXX would continue to broadcast ABC material while WTLV would continue to run NBC programming. Because WBSG (in Brunswick, Georgia) was not a part of the deal, Gannett officials told WTLV employees that they would work to expand WJXX's signal strength in hopes of "filling in the signal to the north," so viewers in Southeast Georgia would continue to see ABC programming. The two stations would also maintain separate sales staffs.

Besides distinct programming, tower facilities and sales staffs, Gannett executives announced that all the remaining operations and facilities would be combined under one roof. The two stations would share news, production, promotion, and engineering resources. WTLV employees were told that several staff members would likely be brought over from WJXX but that details about the exact number of people and their job descriptions would come later. Perhaps the most dramatic announcement came, however, when corporate leaders announced that the two stations might also share a single, "expanded" news product. The company was considering consolidating resources in some sort of simulcast scenario.

Across town at WJXX, employees were also told of the sale although, reportedly, they received far fewer details about the transaction than employees at WTLV (Harrell). Many of the 60 anchors, reporters, producers, and technicians in the station's newsroom were angry (Harrell). Some took to the internet to voice their displeasure. On one

[25] As an employee at the time, this author was privy to information not otherwise available outside of WTLV. I took notes during the staff meeting and those notes contribute heavily to the discussion here.

website a staffer lamented, "Talk about literally being eaten alive by the competition. Allbritton has sold out its employees to Gannett…. The sale of the station is heartbreaking for many of us. We all came to WJXX with a dream. Allbritton has turned it into a nightmare."[26] Several staff members were upset that their owners were backing out of what they thought was a minimum, five-year commitment. According to one senior videotape editor, "to walk in one day and find out that the five-year plan had become a two-year plan and Gannett was buying the station was very shocking and very disappointing. I think everybody in this newsroom feels that way" (Patton, 1999b).

While many were frustrated, the sale came as no surprise to some, especially given WJXX's low ratings since going on the air two years before:

> (T)he corporate types were going to allow the hemorrhaging to continue (for only so long) before they pulled the plug. Someone once said… let truth and falsehood grapple and in the end truth will win out. I guess the truth did win out and the truth is the almighty $ and the bottom line are the only things that matter. (Harrell, p. 14)

In fact, ratings were a problem at WJXX. The FCC allowed Gannett to buy WJXX because WJXX was not among the top four commercial competitors in the Jacksonville market. According to Nielsen ratings the week before the sale was announced, WJXX was tied for fifth in the market with the city's UPN affiliate – behind NBC, CBS, FOX, and Warner Brothers (Basch, 1999: Patton, 1999a; Patton, 1999b). In his article, "Anchors Away: What if you started a TV station… and nobody watched?", Harrell noted that WJXX regularly drew fewer viewers than the city's Warner Brothers and UPN stations.

[26] Quote was retrieved from www.newsblues.com/secure/stations/wjxx.htm, downloaded via internet 11/25/1999.

In March of 2000, the FCC officially approved the new duopoly. Immediately after the purchase was approved, Gannett halted all news operations at WJXX and began simulcasting newscasts produced by WTLV on both channels. Network programming remained as it was on NBC and ABC.

Serving Company and/or Public Interests

The duopoly was not only something brand new to Jacksonville, it was something new to the country. This would be the first time in history that two of the top three network affiliates would be owned by the same company in the same city. The question was raised: What would these new ownership conditions mean for the Jacksonville community? Would it be good or bad for citizens? Perspectives were mixed.

Free-Market Supporters

Business leaders, especially those involved in the local broadcast news industry, lauded the duopoly as an opportunity to do three things: (1) Save a station that was struggling financially; (2) Increase revenues which would lead to stronger programming choices for citizens; and (3) consolidate resources so that the news-gathering operation could be expanded and improved. Evidence to support the first claim was offered by Josh McGraw, President of Clear Channel Communication's Jacksonville operations. For several years, Clear Channel, which owned the local FOX affiliate, helped run

Jacksonville's UPN affiliate under a Local Marketing Agreement (LMA). While different than a duopoly, the outcome was arguably the same. McGraw contended that the UPN affiliate was on its way out of business and may not have survived if it weren't for the financial and logistical help his company provided (Gordon, 1999). The arrangement, he said, benefited both stations.

Gannett executives had similar hopes for their newly-combined operation. According to WTLV General Manager Ken Tonning, the duopoly would give Gannett "an opportunity to compete for a greater share of the advertiser dollars" in Jacksonville (Gordon, 1999). Those dollars could then be turned around to help pay for better programming on both stations. Sherry Burns, General Manager at the competing CBS affiliate, agreed with that assessment: "I think it does give you a certain marketing strength, both in terms of acquiring advertising and in buying programs," (Basch, 1999).

Not only was it an opportunity to strengthen Gannett's market position among advertisers, it was a chance to strengthen the company's stock portfolio as well. By combining the operations of both stations under one roof, the company could cut expenses and further increase revenues. Shortly after the sale was approved, Gannett put WJXX's building up for sale for $2.75 million dollars (Barker-Benfield, 2000). Cameras, electronic newsgathering equipment and computers not necessary in the newly-combined news operation would also be sold off. The money would help offset the cost of converting both stations' signals from analog to digital (a costly change mandated by the federal government), plus the costs of building new sets and expanding facilities at WTLV.

By decreasing overhead costs and eliminating duplicative operations, the economies of scale would benefit Gannett financially. But would local news viewers benefit as well? They would lose one of the city's three local television news operations. Tonning believed that the duopoly would give viewers "a more comprehensive, more in-depth newscast… It will give us the resources to establish news bureaus" (Ostrow, 2000). The merger of Channel 12's and Channel 25's news operations, he claimed, would give Gannett a chance to "create a more comprehensive newscast that will cover a larger geographical area, from Brunswick to St. Augustine" (Harrell, p. 18). McGraw said the marketing agreement between FOX and UPN did exactly that for Clear Channel's news operations, paving the way for expanded coverage at both stations (Gordon, 1999). However, McGraw admitted that, "Since television duopolies are just beginning, it's too soon to say how consumers will be affected" (Basch, 1999).

A Conflicting Point of View

Ironically, at the time the duopoly was approved by the FCC, WJXX appeared to be making progress – both in the ratings and in the hearts and minds of some news viewers. TV-25 was enjoying some of its best ratings ever (Patton, 1999b). Many former and current journalists and media managers in the Jacksonville area believed Allbritton brought a much-needed alternative voice to the local news scene and was doing a good job covering the local community (Patton, 1999b). Their concern was:

What would happen when the sale reduced the number of independent local news voices in the market?

Clearly, there would be a human price to pay for consolidation in Jacksonville. In addition to equipment and facilities, personnel from WJXX were part of Gannett's cost-cutting measures. Media reports at the time of the sale put WJXX's news staff at between 40 and 60 employees (Patton, 1999a). General Manager Ken Tonning said about 20 WJXX employees would be joining the TV-12 operation (Ostrow). The majority of those jobs, however, were reserved for sales staff and other departments. In a personal conversation between myself and Mike McCormick, News Director at First Coast News, I was told only six or seven people from WJXX's news operation were brought to WTLV after the sale. Those positions included three anchors (two news anchors and one weather anchor), one reporter, a producer, and at least one photographer/editor.[27] Dozens of reporters, producers, editors, photographers, and news managers were let go.

The decision to eliminate so many journalistic voices saddened more than the staffers who lost their jobs. A former WTLV news anchor called the elimination of an entire local news operation disturbing: "I don't think that it's good for the viewer. It reduces competition. As a result, the product will be more stagnant and less varied in view" (Patton, 1999a). In another interview, the same anchor argued: "There's the danger that with all this consolidation, eventually everybody is all going to be speaking from the same mouth" (Patton, 1999b). Her position was reiterated by political leaders. Jacksonville City Councilman Lake Ray was critical of the deal and wanted to stop it

[27] These employees were brought over primarily to maintain WJXX's 7pm magazine newscast. Gannett agreed to continue producing the broadcast on its ABC affiliate.

from going through. He argued that, if the media consolidation trend were to continue, "You could ultimately have only one local television news source in Jacksonville… We're in danger of losing different points of view and different ways of covering the news" (Harrell, p. 17).

By most accounts, it would take time to see whether consolidation would be good or bad for the citizens of Jacksonville. However, the impact proved to be far more immediate for residents in South Georgia. Since WBSG-TV in Georgia was not part of Allbritton's deal with Gannett (and since WJXX's signal did not reach all the way to Brunswick), citizens in that part of the market were temporarily without an ABC affiliate. And remember, Allbritton had already shut down the news operation at WBSG. So in the duopoly dance, residents in South Georgia lost a local news provider in the process (Dickson, 2000).

An Opportunity for Research

Gannett's acquisition of WJXX is a prime example of media consolidation which has so notably impacted the broadcast industry in recent years. In a news release describing the purchase, Gannett executives proudly pointed out it now owned 22 television stations reaching 17.4 percent of the U.S. television market (Gannett, 1999). Regarding the company's ownership of WTLV and the impending purchase of WJXX, Cecil Walker, President and CEO of Gannett Broadcasting, called the purchase "a new strategic opportunity for us to build a stronger 'First Coast News' operation to better serve the viewers" (Gannett, 1999).

The question remains whether this acquisition has, in fact, served the best interests of Jacksonville's television news viewers. While network programming remained "as is" on both channels, shortly after acquiring WJXX, Gannett consolidated the news departments from both stations into a single newsgathering operation, simulcasting "First Coast News" on both stations. The sales staff was left intact. The news operation at WJXX, however, was systematically dismantled, with a very small number of employees moving over to the new organization. The Jacksonville market lost dozens of diverse journalistic voices.

Critics argue such duopoly conditions inevitably reduce the diversity (and quality) of programming in local markets. In contrast, supporters of the free-market approach suggest the economies of scale achieved through such an acquisition will result in an improved news product. To date, however, no one has gathered empirical evidence to support either position. This dissertation contributes just such data to the duopoly debate. It is a longitudinal case study analyzing the newscasts of one of the nation's first duopolies before and after consolidation.

Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Rationale

Although it has been five years since the 1999 FCC rule change that allowed consolidation in local television ownership, there have been no published studies that directly assess the impact of ownership deregulation on news content – a line of research called for by policy experts like Gomery (2000, 2001) and Napoli (2001) as well as Congress (through the *Telecommunications Act of 1996*) and the Courts (in *Fox v. FCC* and *Sinclair v. FCC*). This will be the first. The study draws directly from the discussion of democratic aims and public interest ideals set forth for broadcast owners (detailed in Chapter 2), and builds on the work of previous researchers (discussed in Chapter 3). Specifically, it examines the impact of media consolidation on quality, as defined by local television news' diversity and localism. These concepts are applied in the present study in hopes of finding out what happens to news content, over time, when one company is allowed to own two television stations in the same local media market – in this case, Jacksonville, Florida.

Pre-Consolidation Comparison

Before examining the longitudinal effects of ownership consolidation, it is first necessary to establish how the two television stations (WJXX and WTLV) differentiated themselves *before* consolidation. Therefore, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: How similar or different were WJXX and WTLV newscasts in terms of diversity before consolidation.

RQ2: How similar or different were WJXX and WTLV newscasts in terms of localism before consolidation.

In addition to more general research questions, the author had specific notions about what she would find in the comparison of WJXX and WTLV. The first had to do with geographical coverage of the region. Before taking to the air in Jacksonville, Allbritton's only presence in the DMA was via a small station in South Georgia. The company shifted operations from the Brunswick area to Jacksonville in 1997 but WJXX maintained a reputation in the market for covering communities in South Georgia. Given its historical roots, the author hypothesized that, before consolidation:

H1: WJXX devoted more attention than WTLV to covering the South Georgia segment of the local community.

The author's second notion also had historical ties. At the time of the pre-consolidation comparison, WJXX had only been doing news in Jacksonville for approximately two years. WTLV had been on the air for nearly fifty. Given WTLV's long-standing presence in the market, the author hypothesized that:

H2: WTLV devoted more resources than WJXX to enterprise reporting.

Enterprise reporting includes in-depth interviews, analysis, investigations, news series, and station projects. Compared to "News of the Day," it is more contextual and involves larger issues and trends. Theoretically, the author believed a station with deeper ties to a community (including a seasoned news staff more familiar with the Jacksonville market) would be positioned to produce more of this kind of news compared to a "start-up" operation. (Additional details regarding Enterprise versus News of the Day reporting will be provided in the following chapter.)

Pre-Post Consolidation Comparison

Once similarities and differences are established between the two stations before consolidation, it becomes possible to determine how Gannett's news "product" evolved over time. Hypothetically, free market supporters would argue that, by consolidating their holdings in Jacksonville, Gannett was able to achieve economic efficiencies which would translate into more innovative and higher quality content. The researcher wondered whether that would be the case and posed the following questions:

RQ3: Did the combined resources of two television stations translate into increased diversity?

RQ4: Did the combined resources of two television stations translate into increased localism?

Critics of the free market view would hypothesize that corporations like Gannett (especially publicly-traded companies, where profits are often paramount), are unlikely to reinvest additional profits into the news product – preferring instead to improve their financial "bottom line." To test that view, the author put forth the following three hypotheses – each of which involves the additional allocation of resources:

H3: Compared to pre-consolidation WJXX, post-consolidation FCN did not maintain a commitment to coverage in South Georgia.

H4: Compared to pre-consolidation WTLV, post-consolidation FCN did not allocate more reporters to local coverage.

H5: Compared to pre-consolidation WTLV, post-consolidation FCN did not devote more resources to enterprise reporting.

Project Summary

To understand the impact of local television ownership consolidation, WJXX (ABC/Allbritton) and WTLV (NBC/Gannett) will first be compared to identify similarities and differences in news content when the TV stations were owned by separate companies. After consolidation, First Coast News, which represents the merged news operations of WJXX with WTLV, will be compared with WTLV's pre-consolidation newscasts.

The analysis of newscasts before and after consolidation sets out to answer the question: Do the combined resources of two television stations translate into higher quality local coverage? Specifically, this research study will examine the impact of media consolidation on local television news quality as defined by diversity and localism. Free market supporters suggest economies of scale help create higher quality coverage that is more diverse and more local. This analysis seeks to provide evidence that either buttresses or belies those claims by comparing WTLV with First Coast News in 2003, nearly four years after consolidation.

CHAPTER 6:
Method

To understand the impact of media consolidation, the author used the creation of one of the nation's first duopolies as an opportunity to empirically examine the effect of consolidation on the quality of local news as defined by diversity and localism. By studying these TV stations before and after consolidation, the author was able to take advantage of a research opportunity that had the attributes of a longitudinal case study and a quasi-experimental field study (Campbell & Stanley, 1969; Wimmer & Dominick, 1994).

Having worked at WTLV prior to Gannett's purchase of WJXX, the author was aware of the sale before it was approved by the FCC. Because of her awareness of the pending sale, the author decided to treat Gannett's business opportunity like a quasi-experimental field study and collect data before and after the sale. As the creation of the duopoly was one of the first of its kind, the author also recognized the business situation should also be treated as a case study.

The first set of data, which was collected before the sale, would establish the differences between newscasts produced by WJXX and WTLV and serve as a pre-test in a quasi-field experiment. The second set of data, which was collected after the duopoly was created, would examine the impact of consolidation on the quality of news and serve as a post-test. Since there was no control group, the quasi-experimental design theoretically is weak on internal validity (Wimmer & Dominick, p. 98). The author's purpose, however, was to use the attributes of quasi-experiment, combined with a case study, to assess the impact of consolidation.

The Sample

Rather than content analyze a random sample of newscasts before and after consolidation, the author decided a purposive sample would be more appropriate.[28] According to Wimmer and Dominick, a purposive sample is chosen with the knowledge that it is not representative of the general population but instead includes "data selected on the basis of specific characteristics or qualities" (p. 67). Babbie (1979) prefers to use the term "judgmental" to describe a non-probability purposive sample, where the researcher selects the units to be observed based on their own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of the research aims (p.195). Purposive samples are the dominant sample type in content analysis studies published in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. According to Riffe and Freitag (1996), 68% of articles published from 1971 to 1995 used purposive samples (Riffe & Freitag, 1996, cited in Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, p. 84).

[28] As Riffe, Lacy, and Fico point out, probability sampling is rarely used in the study of local television news (1998, p. 87). Unlike studies of newspaper content, in television, collecting news content is extremely time-sensitive. It is often impossible to collect samples after a market change has occurred. Newspaper content is often archived and available for decades after a change (either from the paper itself or local libraries). In broadcasting, however, stations tend to discard recordings of their newscasts one week or one month after the original air date (largely due to a lack of storage space for videotapes over long periods of time). Because the researcher once lived in the market and had access to video recording devices, she was able to collect data from home before the FCC approved the duopoly. Normally, such content would not be available after the fact..

In the author's judgment, the most appropriate sample would include early and late evening newscasts broadcast during a ratings period.[29, 30] At these times, local TV stations often produce their best newscasts in order to attract the most viewers and distinguish themselves from competitors.[31] First, the author recorded one week of newscasts for WJXX and WTLV during the February 2000 pre-consolidation ratings period as well as one week of newscasts for the November 2003 ratings period (more than three years after the two stations were merged to form First Coast News – FCN). The pre-consolidation sample included 20 newscasts or 10 hours and 25 minutes for each TV station;[32] the post-consolidation sample included 20 newscasts or 10 hours and 25 minutes for FCN.[33]

[29] Included in the analysis were newscasts which aired at 5 p.m., 5:30 p.m., 6 p.m., and 11 p.m., Monday through Friday. Weekend, mornings, and noon newscasts were not included. Traditionally, early-evening and late newscasts receive the lion's share of resources in local television news. Therefore, the author felt it reasonable to focus on these primary newscasts as a measure of the station's "best" work. WJXX's 7pm newscast was also not included in the content analysis as it was the only 7pm newscast in the market at the time the study began.

[30] Four times a year, AC Nielsen conducts research to determine how many people are watching which television stations in local markets (and nationwide). Nielsen ratings allow stations to set advertising rates for the following quarter. During so-called "sweeps" months (February, May, July, and November), stations work diligently to gain viewers and attempt to distinguish themselves from the competition. July is also a "sweeps" month. However, within the industry, viewing habits (and the resulting research "numbers") are known to be substantially different during summer viewing months. Therefore, the researcher excluded July as a possible month for data collection.

[31] Content produced during so-called "sweeps" presents an ethical dilemma for some media scholars. Erlich (1995) makes clear the explicit goal of sweeps is to maximize audiences and profits, which strongly increases the pressure to produce sensationalistic or "sleazy" news to attract viewers (p. 37). He admits, however, that stories produced during ratings can also be more substantive.

[32] Pre-consolidation newscasts for WJXX and WTLV were collected on Monday, February 7 through Friday, February 11, 2000.

[33] Post-consolidation newscasts for FCN were collected on Wednesday, November 19 through Tuesday, November 24, 2003. It should be pointed out that the pre-consolidation data set was collected Monday – Friday while the post-consolidation data set was collected Wednesday – Tuesday. In addition, the pre-consolidation data set was collected during February ratings while the post-consolidation set was collected during November ratings. As both sets of data involve five weekdays during critical ratings periods, she does not believe these differences will affect the outcome of the analysis.

More than three years elapsed between the two data sets. This decision, too, was purposive. According to McCombs, researchers studying competition and news content should attempt to select points far enough away from the date of suspension to eliminate the "perturbation" of this change in the market, yet still be "close enough in time to be pertinent" (1988, Footnote #3, p. 131). Following McCombs' lead, the author waited three-and-a-half years to collect the second data set, which provides a point of comparison after the combined news operation had a chance to settle.

Unit of Analysis

Although 30-minute newscasts were recorded before and after consolidation, the unit of analysis was the individual story. Most of the research questions were answered and hypotheses tested using the individual news story. In some cases, however, the complete newscast was used for analysis and comparison.

Variables

A content analysis that examines the impact of competition (or decreasing competition) should, according to McCombs, begin with broad comparisons of the media outlets and "progressively narrow the scope of these comparisons" (1988, p. 132). He believes issues such as presentation style should first be examined, followed by the specific variables under examination. To that end, in the present analysis, each story was first coded for general production variables. Then, stories were coded for variables associated with diversity and localism. Finally, each newscast was coded for variables such as time allotted to news, sports, weather, and commercials.

Production Variables

Production variables common to television news studies were coded to assess the story format and source of material. Such variables would help to provide a general overview of the respective stations' presentation styles and choices.

Story Format: The coding scheme for "story format" involved six categories, ranging from least to most complex.[34] "Readers" are stories presented by the anchors from the news set and include no videotape or interview sound. Voice-Overs (VOs) are similar, only they include edited videotape. Sound-on-tape (SOT) stories involve a script read by anchors with an interview snippet included. Voice-Over-Sound-On-Tape stories (VO/SOTs) include both video and an interview segment. Anchors also present these stories. Finally, there are "Packages," in which pre-recorded reporter audio tracks are combined with video to create a complete, stand-alone story. This last format involves the highest level of complexity and is typically the most time consuming type of story a television station can produce. More than any other presentation style, it involves the coordinated effort of several staff members, including reporters, photographers, editors, and producers.

[34] A seventh category, "Other," was also available as a coding category.

Source of Material: For each story, the source of material was coded. Locally-produced stories were differentiated from stories provided through affiliate "wire" or "feed" services. If the story was produced within the Designated Market Area (DMA), it was coded as such. If, however, the story was produced by another news organization, such as Cable News Network (CNN), network feed services (ABC and NBC), or statewide consortia, it was coded as "Wire & Feed" material.[35]

Diversity

Diversity is one of two elements that define news in the public interest. The general concept requires researchers to examine both the breath of topics and the scope of voices included in the *marketplace of ideas*. The inclusion of multiple perspectives and topics suggests that the station values competing views and ideas. As such, both diversity of topic and diversity of sources were examined in the present study.

Diversity of Topics: The first measure of diversity involves the scope of topics included in the stations' newscasts. A broad range of topics suggests the news organization is covering a diverse selection of issues in the community. In this study, stories were coded in one of 22 different categories:

[35] Because it can be difficult to distinguish the true origin of some stories, a category of "Other/Unable" was also included in the coding scheme. In a related note, making a distinction between "wire & feed" stories and locally-produced stories takes a trained eye. Coders highly-familiar with local television news production processes are best suited to make such determinations. In addition, it is critical that the coders be familiar with the geographic region.

1	Crime
2	Accidents & Incidents
3	Weather &/or Natural Disasters
4	Government/Politics/Campaigns/Elections
5	Construction/Growth/Planning/City Expansion/Roadway Problems/Traffic Congestion
6	Daily Traffic Reports
7	Consumer News
8	Health news/Medical Developments & Breakthroughs
9	Science & Technology
10	Education
11	Parenting/Family Issues
12	Religion
13	Environment
14	Economics/Finance/Banking/Business/Employment
15	Military News/Military Action/War/Civil Unrest/Hijackings/Terrorism
16	Entertainment
17	Human Interest Stories
18	Sports & Recreation
19	Humorous/Animals/Bon-Mots/Closing words/"Kickers"
20	Non-Dominant Group Issues
99	Cannot determine/Other
22	Public Safety

To achieve reliability and validity, the measurement of any variable requires mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. According to Poindexter and McCombs (2000), the research instrument must provide only one possible response choice, the list of options should be comprehensive, and the researcher must clearly articulate and consistently measure the concept being studied (p. 45-46). This can be particularly difficult when assigning stories to topic categories. Therefore, coding instructions on this variable were detailed and explicit (See Appendix C: Codebook).

Each story was examined to determine its *dominant* topic. If coders could not decide how to categorize the story, they were urged to consider what the viewer might think the key issue is. Take the example of a student being arrested for placing bombs in a school. Student safety is clearly important to the educational system. However, "Education" stories were operationalized as those dealing with specific programs, policy issues and student-related matters in the classroom. In such a case, coders were asked to code as "Crime," not "Education." Although most stories involving governmental action would be coded as "Government," if a city ordinance directly affected an environmental issue, the story was coded as "Environment." If a famous sports figure was arrested for allegedly committing a crime, coders were urged to ask themselves, would we see the story if the alleged perpetrator was "John Doe"? If the answer was no, the story was coded in the "Sports" category. The same held true for celebrities in the news.[36]

When it comes to coding for topics, two categories deserve special attention. The "Non Dominant Group" category was created as an effort to isolate stories affecting people who traditionally receive little attention in and on the news. It was designed to measure coverage of problems, issues, and social realities based on sex, race, age, class, and sexual orientation. Again, an example helps clarify the concept. In 2000, a large rally was held on the steps of Florida's Capital to decry a proposed change in the state's affirmative action policies for higher education. While the story involves educational policy, much of the time, coverage was dominated by discussions of social equity and racial fairness for African Americans. If the story focused on racial issues, it was coded as "Non-Dominant Groups" coverage. If it focused on the educational benefits of a

[36] Some critics might take aim at the ways in which topic categories were defined and measured. In the present analysis, for example, Michael Jackson's arrest on sexual assault charges was coded as an entertainment/human interest story instead of a crime story. In the case of Michael Jackson, it was believed that the story would not have received coverage if it weren't for the singer's status as a pop star. Such decisions are inherently difficult to make. Numerous researchers define topics differently. Those reading this research must decide for themselves whether they feel the measures are reasonable. There is no doubt, however, they are reliable. Ranging from 86% to 96%, inter-coder reliability on topics exceeds social science standards. Details of inter-coder reliability tests conducted in this research are explicated below.

diverse student body or the specific impact of changing policy on student recruiting, it was coded as "Education."

The second topic category worth of special attention involves "Public Safety." 21 topic categories were included in the original research design. Upon further consideration, the researcher added a new category called "Public Safety." Originally, coding instructions called for all investigations and follow-up coverage stemming from accidents or incidents to be categorized under "Accidents and Incidents." However, several stories were included in newscasts which, to the author, seemed to take that coverage to a higher, more contextual level. Therefore, all content involved in the study was re-coded taking the new category into consideration. Under the new coding scheme, a story about a car crash on a local bridge would likely be coded as "Accident/Incident." If, however, the station expanded coverage to discuss ongoing concerns about driver safety and structural integrity of the bridge, the story was re-coded into the "Public Safety" category.

Diversity of Sources: If interviews were included as part of the story, a total number of sources appearing in each story was counted. Anonymous sources were not included, nor were sources which did not appear on camera (unless a direct quote was included verbally or visually). The first four sources were each coded for gender as well as race/ethnicity.[37] Six racial categories were included: (1) White; (2) African

[37] Some scholars may question the author's decision to count all minority sources as a distinct group and all female sources as a distinct group without distinguishing the variety of viewpoints they represent (Brooks, 1997; DeVault, 1999; Hill Collins, 2000). As a feminist scholar, this author admits the risk of making such "pan-ethnic" decisions. However, the absence of women and minorities in broadcast programming has been an issue for decades. Since the Hutchins' Commission report of 1947 ("Commission on Freedom of the Press") and the Kerner Commission report in 1968 ("Report of the

American; (3) Latino/Hispanic; (4) Asian American; (5) Native American, and (6) Unable/Other.

Those same four sources were categorized by "source type" to determine what sorts of individuals were included in stories. Each source was coded as being one of the following six types: (1) private citizens (which included witnesses, neighbors, consumers, students, voters, etc.; (2) politicians and candidates; (3) political activists; (4) experts, authorities, spokespeople (for companies, organizations, or institutions); (5) celebrities; and (6) unable to determine/other. This coding scheme was first employed by Ziegler and White (1990) in their examination of network news sources, a scheme used successfully by the author in two subsequent research projects (Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003; Smith, 1998).

Localism

Localism, one of two elements that defines news in the public interest, is comprised of geographic diversity, local relevance, and local resource allocation.

Geographic Diversity: The author coded the primary geographic location of each story: local, state, southeast, national, international, and "unable/not revealed." Within

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National Advisory Commission," 1968), thoughtful minds have expressed concern about the ways in which the media contribute to social inequities and strife. More recently, concerns have been raised about the impact of media consolidation in particular on women and minorities (Bennet-Haigney, 2001; Giles, 2003). It is with good intentions that this author attempted to measure the presence of women and minorities in the news. Still, such criticisms are reasonable and should be taken into consideration by any scholar examining any demographically-defined cultural groups, especially when it comes to race, sex, class, and sexual orientation.

local coverage, four further coding choices were made. Before discussing those options, it is prudent to remind the reader that the Jacksonville/Brunswick DMA spans nearly 8,000 square miles. Stations doing business here are, theoretically, responsible for covering the entire viewing area, which includes fifteen counties (nine in Florida and six in Georgia). Therefore, in this study, local stories were grouped into one of four geographic categories. First is the "Core DMA," which includes communities closest to city's geographical center. Second is the "Expanded DMA – Florida," which accounts for stories gathered in communities to the west and south. Third, the "Expanded DMA – Georgia" involves stories from South Georgia. Fourth and finally, there are locally-produced stories which don't stipulate a particular location but in some way affect people living across the "Entire DMA."[38]

Local Relevance: Borrowing from a coding scheme used in the Project for Excellence in Journalism's Local TV News Project (conducted between 1998 and 2002), the author also examined the "local relevance" for each story. With some revisions to PEJ's measure, content was coded to determine whether the story directly affects the local community or is “localized” in any way (by way of community examples, local comment, or clarifying the impact on local citizens).[39] Specifically, content was coded as follows:

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[38] Because of their lack of familiarity with the Jacksonville market, inter-coders were asked to write down the location of the story if identified verbally or visually (through graphics). The primary coder then translated this information into distinct categories. Intra-coder reliability tests were later performed by the author to examine the reliability of the measure.

[39] Unlike PEJ's study, however, the researcher did not provide "scores" for each story in these respective areas (PEJ, 2003, p. 23). Repeated efforts to obtain details of PEJ's codebook (or discuss methods of coding decisions) went unanswered by project researchers. Therefore, instead of providing scores, this author considered each element as a discrete option.

1 Emergency Information (with local or national relevance), affecting main viewing area, local subgroups, or institutions
2 Non-local story (state/regional/national/intl) with local impact explained or implied
3 Non-local story (state/regional/national/intl) with no specific local impact
4 Other/Unable to determine

Local Resource Allocation: Other localism variables include the allocation of reporters, method of delivery, and amount of enterprise reporting. In many ways, these variables gauge the allocation of resources to local coverage. Each story was first coded to determine whether it was (or was not) delivered by a reporter. Additionally reporter stories were coded for the method of delivery. Three coding options were available for this variable. Reporter stories were either delivered "live in the field," "live in the station," or via some "other" method (such as a "straight package" with no live reporter presence).

Each story was also coded for the amount of enterprise reporting involved. In local television news, one tends to find two different types of coverage. First, there is so-called "News of the Day," which typically involves events, press conferences, spot news, and other spontaneous coverage (frequently fashioned after stories in the local newspapers). A second kind of coverage is frequently referred to as "Enterprise" reporting. This type of coverage tends to be more contextual and involve larger issues and trends. It frequently involves investigations, in-depth analysis or interviews, news series, or station projects – stories not considered to be "news of the day" – and tends to air more regularly during ratings periods, when the stations are competing against each other for viewers.[40]

Many journalists and media scholars consider enterprise reporting to be more "active" while "News of the Day" coverage tends to be more passive. Therefore, each story was also coded for the amount of active versus passive reporting techniques involved in the telling. The categories were as follows:

1 News of the Day (spontaneous coverage, pre-arranged events, material provided via affiliated feed services)
2 Investigations, In-Depth Interviews, In-Depth stories, news series or station projects

<u>Other Variables</u>

In addition to presentation style, localism, and diversity measures, each individual story was coded for variables common to television news content analyses. Those variables include the specific newscast in which the item appeared (5, 530, 6, or 11 p.m.), the story's order of appearance in the newscast (1^{st}, 2^{nd}, 3^{rd}), and block or segment in which the story appeared (A, B, C, D, E, or "other").

<u>Time Allocation:</u> Because time allocated to reporting a news story can be seen as a measure of the level of importance attached to different issues in the news, each story's

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[40] Data involved in this analysis was gathered only during ratings periods. While competition between stations takes place all year, February, May, and November are months in which stations are particularly competitive – vying against each other for the most viewers. Theoretically, this is the time when a station must put its best foot forward – demonstrating its commitment to telling important and interesting stories. It is at this time of year that stations are known to generate "special" coverage to attract viewers.

length was also coded. As opposed to coding all stories as equivalent, this variable illustrates an alternative methodological approach. It help researchers to differentiate, for example, between a :20 second local crime story and a 2:00 local crime story. Theoretically, the longer the story runs, the greater the story's priority. Therefore, the length of each story was coded and factored into the analysis when appropriate. Individual story lengths were also summed together to create composite data useful to the analysis, including total amount of time allotted to all news, total time allotted to local news, and time allotted to various topic and geographic coverage categories.

Newscast Variables: In addition to coding individual stories, each newscast was coded for station, month, year, and time of day aired, as well as total time allotted to weather, sports, and commercials.

Variables Not Examined: The measures employed in this study center around concepts of diversity and localism – concepts which are notoriously difficult to define and measure. These measures rely largely on research conducted by other television news scholars, literature and court rulings on public interest standards, hearings on policy debates, and perspectives on economic and market theory. Arguably, these variables do not cover the entire scope of what constitutes news "quality." This study does not, for example, make qualitative judgments about context, credibility, interest levels, thoroughness, hard/soft distinctions, sensationalism, or tone (Bernstein & Lacy, 1992; Bodle, 1996; Grabe, Zhou, & Barnett, 2001; Hofstetter & Dozier, 1986; Patterson, 2000; Scott & Gobetz, 1992; Slattery & Hakanen, 1994). Many of these terms are equally difficult to define and measure – especially when it comes to empirical examinations of content.

Other variables not examined include the accuracy of reporting or the station's willingness (or lack of willingness) to address, head on, critical issues affecting the community. Some media critics believe, for example, that instead of offering "objective" or "detached" coverage, which often pits extreme viewpoints against each other and presents opposing perspectives as being "balanced" or "relative," news organizations should be more connected to their respective communities and help citizens make truly informed decisions. This study did not measure "balance" or "fairness."

Additionally, this study relies largely on quality measures devised by scholars, news professionals and regular news viewers. The opinions of citizens who find themselves "turned off" by local television news and its perceived lack of quality are not necessarily represented here. Several researchers assert that viewers measure quality differently than professional journalists and scholars and would call some of the measured employed here "elitist" (See, for example, Costera Meijer, 2003; Parker, 2000; Zaller, 2003). The author has, however, attempted to construct a study which takes some of those critical concerns into consideration.

Data Coding & Reliability

Data coding was conducted in two phases. First, the author trained coders to test the reliability of the codebook. Inter- and intra-coder reliability tests were run on 20% of the study's data. Once acceptable levels of coding agreement were reached and the codebook was deemed reliable, phase two began and the author coded all remaining content.

Inter-Coder Reliability: After several discussions of the variables and revisions of the codebook to achieve high reliability, four people were used to test the reliability of the codebook. As Holsti (1969) points out, "reliability is a function of coders' skills, insight, and experience, clarity of categories and coding rules which guide their use" (p. 136). To ensure higher reliability, the author only recruited coders familiar with television news practices. Two of the coders were graduate students and two were undergraduate students – all of whom studied broadcast news. Each coder, therefore, had some familiarity with local television news processes and practices.

The author trained the coders extensively during two separate coding sessions. Each training session lasted approximately two hours and the author's codebook and coding options were discussed in great detail. Examples of local television newscasts (not including data from in the study) were used to familiarize coders with the variables and coding rules (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, p. 120). Once appropriately trained, the author randomly selected 20% of the study's data for reliability assessment (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, p. 122-124). Their coding decisions were then compared with decisions made by the author.

Inter-coder reliability was calculated using the coefficient of reliability which is a ratio of coding agreements to the total number of coding decision (Holsti, p. 140). The formula is as follows:

$$\text{C.R.} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

In this formula, M is the number of coding decisions on which the two judges are in agreement, and N_1 and N_2 refer to the number of coding decisions made by judges 1 and 2 respectively (Hoslti, p. 140). Using this method, inter-coder reliability percentages ranged from a low of 85% to a high of 100% on key variables – above the minimum standard of 80% (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, p. 128).

Intra-Coder Reliability: Because of their lack of familiarity with the media market being analyzed, inter-coders could not be expected to evaluate certain variables. Inter-coder tests were impractical for three variables in particular: geographic location of the story; local relevance, and local station enterprise. Therefore, intra-coder reliability tests were performed by the author to examine the reliability of these measures. One month after all data was coded, the author re-evaluated 10% of the data to compare her original coding decisions with her current decisions. Using the coefficient of reliability, intra-coder percentages were 89%, 97% and 89% respectively.

Plan for Analysis

To understand the impact of local television ownership consolidation, first, the content from two competing television stations will be compared when those stations were owned by separate companies. Before consolidation, WJXX (the ABC affiliate) was owned by Allbritton Communications and WTLV (the NBC affiliate) was owned by

Gannett Co., Incorporated. More than three years after consolidation, First Coast News, which represents the merged news operations of WJXX with WTLV, will be compared with WTLV's pre-consolidation newscasts.

Two other possible sets of comparisons were eliminated from consideration in the research plan. In the pre-post consolidation analysis, only WTLV is being compared with First Coast News. A similar comparison was *not* made between WJXX (the pre-consolidation Allbritton station) and FCN. The author decided against making that comparison for two reasons. First, theoretically, differences between the two news providers will be made visible in the pre-consolidation analysis. By comparing WJXX and WTLV, similarities and differences between the two stations (and two ownership conditions) will be established. Second, the rationale underlying the present research precludes the necessity of such a comparison. This study is designed to test the free market argument which asserts that economic "efficiencies" (or profits) achieved through ownership consolidation translate into more innovative and higher quality content. In other words, the "surviving" station in the market should, theoretically, do a *better* job of serving the community's public interest needs compared to what it was doing before consolidation. Practically, the most pertinent analysis is between the newscasts produced by the same company before and after consolidation: WTLV and FCN.[41]

A second set of comparisons was also eliminated from the research design. As noted earlier, no control group was included in the analysis. This decision was purposeful and based on market realities in Jacksonville, Florida – the city in which this

[41] McCombs made a similar decision in his studies on print content and decreasing competition, published in 1987 and 1988.

case study was conducted. In 1999, when data collection for the present study began, three stations provided news in Jacksonville – WJXX, WTLV, and WJXT. WJXT was the CBS affiliate and had been producing news for 53 years – longer than any other station in the market. In July of 2002, however, WJXT dropped its CBS affiliate status and became an independent station (McAlister, 2002). By the time the post-consolidation data set was collected, WJXT had notably altered the amount of news it was providing and its presentation style. Due to these changes, the station was unfit for use as a control group. It was also inappropriate to use the market's new CBS station as a control group, as it had not been producing news in 1999 when the study began. Therefore, the author decided against using any control group. Only WJXX, WTLV, and First Coast News were included in the analysis.

Stations will be compared primarily on diversity and localism variables. Research questions regarding similarities and differences between the stations on these factors, as well as general presentation style, will be examined. Hypotheses relating to local resource allocation and geographic diversity of coverage will be tested. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to conduct all statistical tests.

Two methods of measurement will be used throughout this research. The primary unit of analysis is the individual story. Therefore, most comparisons will be based on the number of stories falling into key content categories. The majority of these comparisons will be made using chi-square tests for independent samples. As noted earlier, however, the length for each story was also coded. As such, time allotted to certain categories of coverage will be factored into the analysis.

Project Summary

This longitudinal case study analyzes the newscasts of one of the nation's first so-called duopolies. Using a quasi-experimental research design, the author seeks to discover what kind of long-term impact ownership consolidation had on television news content in Jacksonville, Florida. Content was coded for presentation style, diversity, localism variables. In all, 60 newscasts and 1,048 stories will be examined. The unit of analysis is the individual story. However, each newscast was also coded for key variables, such as total time allotted to weather, sports, and commercials. The analysis of newscasts before and after consolidation sets out to answer the question: Do the combined resources of two television stations translate into higher quality local coverage?

CHAPTER 7:
Results

To understand the impact of local television ownership consolidation, WJXX (ABC/Allbritton) and WTLV (NBC/Gannett) were first compared to identify similarities and differences in news content when the TV stations were owned by separate companies. After consolidation, First Coast News, which represented the merged news operations of WJXX with WTLV, was compared with WTLV's pre-consolidation newscasts. The analysis of newscasts before and after consolidation set out to answer the question: Do the combined resources of two television stations translate into higher quality local coverage? A total of 60 newscasts and 1,048 stories were content analyzed. For the pre-consolidation sample, WJXX aired 361 stories and WTLV aired 359 stories. In the post-consolidation sample, First Coast News aired 328 stories.

WJXX versus WTLV
(Pre-Consolidation Comparison)

Overview

A comparison of WJXX and WTLV prior to consolidation found differences in allocation of time. During the week under examination, each station had 10 hours and 25 minutes of newscast time at its disposal (37,500 seconds). WJXX spent more of its newscasts airing news stories – 55% compared to 45% at WTLV (See Table 1). On average, WJXX ran approximately 17 minutes of news per newscast whereas WTLV ran approximately 14 minutes. The difference in news time is in direct relation to the difference spent in commercials between the two stations. Whereas WJXX ran approximately 5 and one-half minutes of commercials per newscast, WTLV spent 8 and one-half minutes in commercial break, running paid advertisements, public service announcements, and station promotions.

Table 7:1: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Allocation of Newscast Time

Newscast Time:	WJXX		WTLV	
	Total Seconds	% of Time	Total Seconds	% of Time
Total Time	37,500	100	37,500	100
News – All	20,433	55	16,744	45
Commercial Breaks	6,730	18	10,215	27
Weather	4,364	12	4,042	11
Sports	2,964	8	2,939	8
Other	3,009	8	3,650	9

Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

How the two stations spent their remaining time, however, was quite similar. WJXX and WTLV both spent approximately 8% of their newscasts covering sports, and between 11% and 12% on weather. The stations also spent nearly equal proportions of time on the category "other," including cross-talk between anchors (not specifically related to news stories), set bumps (in which the camera pans over the set with music in the background), tower camera shots, and delays due to technical errors.

Despite the fact that the stations varied in the amount of time spent on news, they aired an almost identical number of stories – 361 and 359 respectively. The presentation style and topic selection were, however, often quite different. WJXX spent significantly more time running longer, pre-packaged stories. 31% of their news was delivered this way, compared to 17% at WTLV. As Table 2 shows, WTLV chose, instead, to run more short stories (readers and voice-overs).

Table 7:2: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Story Format

Format:	**WJXX (ABC/Allbritton)**	**WTLV (NBC/Gannett)**
	% of Stories	**% of Stories**
Voice-Overs (VO)	50	65
Packages	31	17
VO/SOTs or SOTs	15	11
Readers	4	7
(Valid Cases)	(360)	(356)

Note: $\chi^2 = 26.431$, df = 3, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = .192; $p < .001$

Statistics show there was no significant difference in the number of stories each station produced locally versus the number of stories drawn from feed services and affiliates. However, there were significant differences in the *type* of material they used. This difference is also reflected in Table 2. WJXX frequently aired un-edited versions of reporter packages fed to the station through Cable News Network (CNN), ABC news, and an affiliated news organization in the state Capital of Tallahassee. Despite similar affiliations, WTLV was more likely to edit the stories into shorter versions. WJXX's use of unedited feed material helps explain why the two stations aired very different amounts of news (as measured by time) yet ran a similar number of news items.

Diversity: Range of Topics, Lead Stories, & Sources

RQ1: How similar or different were WJXX and WTLV newscasts in terms of diversity before consolidation?

To answer the research question, range of topics, lead stories, and range of sources were compared for WJXX and WTLV.

Range of All Topics: The number of stories dedicated to different topic areas was significantly different between WJXX and WTLV.[42] As reflected in Table 3, the most reported topics on WJXX were entertainment, human interest, and sports and recreation, representing 26% of story topics. Only 17% of WTLV stories were dedicated to these topics. WJXX was also significantly more likely than WTLV, however, to cover stories about government, politics, construction and growth. 16% of WJXX stories were on these subjects compared to 7% at WTLV. The most reported topics on WTLV were crime, accidents and incidents (28%) compared to WJXX (15%). On remaining topic categories, coverage was quite similar.

[42] One of the limits of chi square analysis is that it tells us there is a significant association overall between the two variables being tested. What it doesn't tell us is whether the observed frequency *in any particular cell* is significantly different than what was expected. Adjusted residual analysis allows us to analyze the contributions that individual cells make to the overall chi-square test statistic. They can be interpreted like z-scores. If the adjusted residual in any particular cell > 2, that means this particular cell is more than two standard deviations from the mean and contributes significantly to the overall X^2 value. You can be 95% confident that this particular cell is significantly different from zero. Of eleven topic categories included in Table 3, adjusted residual analysis shows three topics categories contributed most to the significant X2 test statistic: entertainment/human/interest/sports&rec, government/politics, construction/growth, and crime/accidents/incidents. For detailed statistical discussion, see Everitt (1992, p. 47) and Haberman (1973, pp. 206-209). In layman's terms, see lecture notes from the University of Illinois Chicago at: http://www.uic.edu/classes/pols/pols401/handouts/note9.pdf.

Table 7:3: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Topic Diversity – All Stories

Topic Diversity:	**WJXX** (ABC/Allbritton)	**WTLV** (NBC/Gannett)
	% of Stories	**% of Stories**
Entertainment/Human Interest/Sports & Rec	26	17
Consumer/Health/Science & Technology	20	21
Government/Politics/Construction/Growth	16	7
Crime/Accidents/Incidents	15	28
Economics/Military	7	8
Non-Dominant Groups	5	6
Public Safety	5	6
Education/Parenting/Family/Religion	3	4
Traffic	3	3
Weather & Disasters	1	2
Other/Unable	1	1
(Valid Cases)	(361)	(359)

NOTE: Column totals may exceed 100% due to rounding.
$\chi^2 = 34.729$, df = 10, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = .220, $p < .001$

Range of Local Topics: The previous analyses included all news stories run by WJXX and WTLV – local, state, national, and international. While this is certainly a measure of a station's choices of what to include in its newscasts, equally important is the diversity of stories produced purely within the Designated Market Area (DMA). As in the previous analysis, a comparison of WJXX and WTLV shows significant differences between the two stations when it comes to *local* topic selection (Table 4). Compared to WTLV, WJXX covered significantly more stories about government, politics, community growth and construction. 21% of WJXX's locally-produced stories focused on these issues, compared to only 3% at WTLV. WTLV, on the other hand, was significantly more likely to lend their local coverage to issues of consumerism, health issues, and science & technology. This was not surprising given that a key anchor at WTLV covers the "health beat" and another high-profile reporter investigates consumer complaints and issues for the station's "12 On Your Side" franchise. On remaining topic choices, the stations appeared to be strikingly similar, allocating similar proportions of their coverage to spot news, public safety issues, education, and entertainment/human interest.

Table 7:4: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Topic Diversity – Locally-Produced Stories

Topic Diversity:	**WJXX** (ABC/Allbritton)	**WTLV** (NBC/Gannett)
	% of Stories	**% of Stories**
Crime/Accidents/Incidents	24	25
Government/Politics Construction/Growth	21	3
Entertainment/Human Interest/Sports & Rec	16	17
Public Safety	10	11
Consumer, Health, Science & Technology	9	18
Traffic	7	7
Other/Unable	7	6
Education/Parenting/Family/Religion	5	7
Non-Dominant Groups	3	7
(Valid Cases)	(129)	(146)

NOTE: Column totals may exceed 100% due to rounding.
χ^2 = 26.207, df = 8, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = .309, $p < .001$

Lead Story Topics: Another predictor of a station's priorities is its choice of "lead." The first story in a newscast is frequently depicted as being the most important story – often worthy of extra production elements, reporter presence, and more time allocated within the newscast compared to other stories. Since only twenty newscasts were coded for each station, lead stories were analyzed qualitatively. In eight out of twenty newscasts, WTLV began its newscasts with spot news such as crime, accidents or incidents.[43] WJXX led with these topics just three times. WTLV also led its newscast seven times with public safety issues whereas WJXX began with this subject only twice. WJXX had no dominant lead story topic. Compared to WTLV, however, it led more frequently with stories about government, politics, construction and growth (4 of 20 newscasts) or consumer, health, and science and technology stories (4 of 20 newscasts). The remaining lead stories were relatively similar for both stations.

Range of Voices: While range of topics is an important gauge of diversity, also important is the range of voices included in the coverage. Of course, a television station does not have much control over the types of sources included in stories coming from feed material (such as those produced by national and statewide affiliate services). The stations *do* have control, however, over who they speak with locally. WJXX included fewer local individuals in their on-air coverage than WTLV (114 versus 174). WJXX also spoke with about half as many women (34 versus 75) and minorities (14 versus 32) as WTLV. Statistics show those differences are significant. Comparing the mean ranks of sources included across twenty newscasts produced by each station, the Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples reveals WTLV talked to significantly more local individuals compared to WJXX (Table 5). WTLV was also significantly more likely than WJXX to use women and minorities as sources.

[43] Crime and court-related leads included an assault committed in the parking lot of a local hotel (and a resulting lawsuit) and a standoff between a man and the city's Swat Team. Accident and Incident-related lead stories included a car crashing into a daycare, a plane crashing into a hospital, and a house fire killing a man.

Table 7:5: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Diversity of Local Sources

	Station	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
# of Local Sources	WJXX	20	16.55	331.000
	WTLV	20	24.45	489.000
# of Female Sources	WJXX	20	14.82	296.50
	WTLV	19	25.45	483.50
# of Minority Sources	WJXX	20	16.42	328.50
	WTLV	19	23.76	451.50

Note: Mann-Whitney U = 121.000; Female, U = 86.500; Minority, U = 118.500 ($p < .01$)

Diversity Summary: RQ1 asked how similar or different WJXX and WTLV newscasts were in terms of diversity before consolidation. Results show significant differences in several topic categories. When all stories were examined, WJXX ran significantly more stories on entertainment, human interest, and sports and recreation as well as government, politics, construction, and growth whereas WTLV focused more heavily on coverage of crime, accidents, and incidents. When local stories were isolated for examination, however, differences between the stations on the number of spot news stories disappeared. Locally, approximately one-quarter of the coverage from both stations involved such topics. Other differences arose, however. At the local level, WJXX covered significantly more stories about government, politics, community growth and construction whereas WTLV devoted more of their coverage to consumerism, health, and science & technology. The two stations were also different in their choice of lead stories. In 15 of 20 newscasts, WTLV led with spot news stories (crime, accidents, and incidents) or public safety concerns. There was no such dominant lead story topic for

WJXX. Finally, compared to WJXX, WTLV included significantly more local sources, women, and minorities in their newscasts.

<u>Localism: Covering the Local Community & Allocating Resources</u>

RQ2: How similar or different were WJXX and WTLV newscasts in terms of localism before consolidation?

To answer the research question, the proportion of stories and amount of time dedicated to local coverage were compared between WJXX and WTLV. Localism was also measured in terms of resource allocation. Specifically, the inclusion of reporters in local coverage and their method of delivery were examined. Hypotheses regarding the geographic diversity of local coverage and amount of enterprise reporting were also tested.

<u>Geographic Focus of News Coverage:</u> WJXX and WTLV were generally similar when it came to the overall geographic focus of their coverage. Both ran nearly equal proportions of state (19%) and national/international stories (43% and 40% respectively). 36% of WJXX's news items were local compared to 41% at WTLV but these differences were not significant (p=.15). While the *proportion* of local stories was similar between WJXX and WTLV, the amount of *time* dedicated to local news coverage differed dramatically. Local news represented slightly more than one-third (34%) of WJXX newscasts and almost two-thirds (63%) of WTLV newscasts (Table 6). In other words, WTLV spent considerably more time covering the local community before consolidation.

Table 7:6: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Allocation of Local Newscast Time

Newscast Time:	**WJXX**		**WTLV**	
	Total Seconds	**% of Time**	**Total Seconds**	**% of Time**
Total Time – News	20,433	100	16,744	100
News – Local	6,871	34	10,467	63
News – Non-Local (State, Natl, Intl.)	13,562	66	6,277	37

H1: WJXX devoted more attention than WTLV to covering the South Georgia segment of the local community.

Given its historic connection with South Georgia viewers, it was hypothesized that WJXX would devote more attention than WTLV to covering this particular segment of the local community. To test the hypothesis, two separate variables were analyzed: the proportion of stories and the proportion of time. As Table 7 illustrates, when the proportion of stories was analyzed, the hypothesis was supported. The majority of both stations' local coverage comes out of the "Core DMA." 78% of WJXX stories fell into this category compared to 83% at WTLV. Adjusted residual analysis shows these proportions do not account for much of the difference between the two stations. The remaining three categories, however, demonstrate a clear difference in covering expanded communities. WJXX ran significantly more stories from South Georgia (14%) compared to WTLV (1%). Of the 146 local stories WTLV included in its newscasts, just two directly involved South Georgia. Instead, WTLV focused more of its coverage on stories from the "Expanded – Florida" region (to the West and South) and on stories affecting the "Entire DMA."

**Table 7:7: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Geographic Diversity of Local Coverage
(Proportion of Stories)**

Geographic Location:	WJXX (ABC/Allbritton)	WTLV (NBC/Gannett)
	% of Stories	**% of Stories**
Core DMA	78	83
Expanded–GA	14	1
Expanded–FL	3	6
Entire DMA	5	10
(Valid Cases)	(128)	(146)

Note: $\chi^2 = 18.885$, df = 3, p <.001; Cramer's V = .263, p < .001

The hypothesis was also supported when time allotted to local coverage was examined. Unlike the story-to-story analysis, using this method, one can see that the proportion of newscast time devoted to "Core" market coverage is nearly equivalent between stations (Table 8). Differences between WJXX and WTLV on Georgia coverage remain, however. At WJXX, nine percent of local news coverage involved South Georgia versus about two percent at WTLV.

**Table 7:8: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Geographic Diversity of Local Coverage
(Proportion of Time)**

Geographic Location:	WJXX (ABC/Allbritton)		WTLV (NBC/Gannett)	
	% of Time	**Avg. Length (In Seconds)**	**% of Time**	**Avg. Length (In Seconds)**
Core DMA	82	56	83	72
Expanded–FL	3	47	5	69
Expanded–GA	9	32	2	87
Entire DMA	6	62	10	67

When WJXX covered the South Georgia region, its stories were shorter, averaging 32 seconds; when WTLV covered the region, its stories averaged 1 minute and 27 seconds.

Local Resource Allocation: Resource allocation is measured by the number of reporters featured on air, the method of delivery for reporter stories, and the amount of enterprise reporting. When it came to covering the local community, WTLV was significantly more likely than WJXX to dedicate reporters to that coverage. Almost half of WTLV's local stories involved reporters (47%) versus one-third (34%) at WJXX (χ^2 = 4.769, df = 1, p <.05; Cramer's V = .029, p < .05). When reporters were involved, WTLV was significantly more likely to deliver those stories live in the field or live from the station. WJXX, on the other hand, aired significantly more so-called "straight packages," with no live reporter presence (Table 9).

Table 7:9: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Reporter Location

Reporter Location:	**WJXX (ABC/Allbritton)**	**WTLV (NBC/Gannett)**
	% of Stories	**% of Stories**
Station	14	43
Live	2	35
Straight Pkg/Other	83	22
(Valid Cases)	(42)	(68)

Note: χ^2 = 40.385, df = 2, p < .001; Cramer's V = .606, p < .001

H2: WTLV devoted more resources than WJXX to enterprise reporting.

"Enterprise" stories are another way in which resource allocation can be measured at the local level. Such stories focus on in depth, contextual coverage of issues and trends, news series, investigations, and station projects and are involve more active reporting. "Day Of" stories, on the other hand, tend to be more passive, focusing on scheduled events, spot news, and more spontaneous coverage. Given its longevity in the market, it was hypothesized that WTLV would devote more resources than WJXX to this type of reporting. The hypothesis was supported. Table 10 shows that WTLV was significantly more likely than WJXX to include enterprise reporting in its local coverage. 23% of WTLV's local stories were classified as enterprise but only 8% of WJXX stories were enterprise.

Table 7:10: WJXX v WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)
Enterprise Reporting

Type of Coverage:	WJXX (ABC/Allbritton)	WTLV (NBC/Gannett)
	% of Stories	% of Stories
"Day Of"	92	77
Enterprise	8	23
(Valid Cases)	(128)	(145)

Note: $\chi^2 = 12.294$, df = 1, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = .212, $p < .001$)

Of the twenty newscasts examined at WJXX, only ten items appeared in their coverage that could be considered "enterprise reporting." WTLV had more than three times that number (34). Time allotment analysis shows similar results. When locally-produced stories were examined, just 5% (or 17 minutes and 23 seconds) of WJXX total local news time was dedicated to enterprise reporting compared to 19% (53 minutes and 23 seconds) at WTLV.

Localism Summary: RQ2 asked how similar or different WJXX and WTLV newscasts were in terms of localism before consolidation. Results show the two stations differed on nearly every variable examined. WTLV covered twice as much local news as WJXX. While both stations focused the majority of their local coverage on the "Core DMA," WJXX was significantly more likely to cover South Georgia whereas WTLV was more likely to cover communities to the West and South (the so-called "Expanded – FL" portion of the DMA). Compared to WJXX, WTLV was significantly more likely to dedicate reporters to their newscasts and to feature those reporters "live" (either from the field or the station). WTLV was also significantly more likely to include "enterprise" reporting in their coverage. The number of reporters, live reports from the field, and enterprise reporting are distinguishing characteristics of quality news.

WTLV versus First Coast News
(Pre-Post Comparison)

Shortly after the data comparing WJXX and WTLV were collected, Gannett officially purchased WJXX, merged its news operation into WTLV and began simultaneously broadcasting a newly-created newscast on both stations. First Coast News (FCN) was born. WJXX's equipment and personnel were relocated and absorbed into the existing facilities at WTLV. Gannett constructed a new set to feature the newly-combined, First Coast News operation. Designers built the set into the existing newsroom facility at WTLV, to give the presentation of news a more "active" feel than the previous studio-enclosed set. In many ways, the new anchor set closely resembled the look of the set at WJXX before the sale. Over time, several of the faces changed as well. New anchors and new reporters were hired – in many cases, to replace reporters and anchors lost through attrition.

The following analysis compares Gannett-owned newscasts before and after consolidation. Generally, the author set out to answer the question: Do the combined resources of two television stations translate into higher quality local coverage? More specifically, the author wondered whether the "surviving," consolidated news operation at First Coast News would produce more innovative, more diverse or more local coverage (as the free market model would suggest) or whether the station would simply go on producing news largely as it had done before (as public trustee supporters would suggest). In addition to more general research questions, it was hypothesized that Gannett would *not* allocate additional resources to its news-gathering operation, either by maintaining WJXX's commitment to covering the South Georgia (H3) or by increasing the allocation of reporters (H4) or amount of enterprise reporting (H5).

Overview

In the nearly four years after WJXX was merged into WTLV and the duopoly was created, slight changes were seen in the station's overall presentation of news. The number of stories included in their newscasts decreased from 356 to 327. A comparison between WTLV and FCN found, however, that the allocation of time to news increased. During the week under examination, each station had 10 hours and 25 minutes of newscast time at its disposal (37,500 seconds). Data show, after consolidation, half of FCN's newscasts were dedicated to news stories compared to 45% at WTLV before consolidation – a 5% increase (See Table 11). As amount of time devoted to news increased, the amount of time dedicated to commercials, weather and sports decreased at FCN. Weather coverage dropped by 2% and sports by 3%. The difference in sports time was due largely to Gannett's decision to drop the sports segment from its 5:30 p.m. newscast.

Table 7:11: WTLV v FCN (Pre-Post Consolidation)
Allocation of Newscast Time

Newscast Time:	**WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)**		**FCN (Post-Consolidation)**	
	Total Seconds	**% of Time**	**Total Seconds**	**% of Time**
Total Time	37,500	100	37,500	100
News – All	16,744	45	18,522	50
Commercial Breaks	10,215	27	9,585	26
Weather	4,042	11	3,387	9
Sports	2,939	8	1,953	5
Other	3,650	9	4,053	11

Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Story formats remained virtually the same between 2000 and 2003. WTLV ran virtually the same proportion of readers (7% versus 6%), VOs (65%), vo/sots (11% versus 8%), and packages (17% versus 21%) as FCN did. The differences were not significant (p=.27).

Diversity: Range of Topics, Lead Stories, & Sources

RQ3: Did the combined resources of two television stations translate into increased diversity?

To answer the research question, range of topics, lead stories, and range of sources were compared for WTLV and FCN.

Range of All Topics: The number of stories dedicated to different topic areas was significantly different between WTLV and FCN.[44] Compared to WTLV, FCN covered significantly fewer stories about crime, accidents, and incidents. Public safety matters and non-dominant groups also received significantly less coverage. Significant increases were seen, however, in the number of stories dedicated to government, politics, construction, and growth, rising from 7% in 2000 to 20% in 2003 (Table 12).

[44] Of eleven topic categories, adjusted residual analysis shows five topics contributed to significant differences: Crime/Accidents/Incidents, Public Safety, Government/Politics/Construction/Growth, Non-Dominant Groups, and Other.

Table 7:12: WTLV v FCN (Pre-Post Consolidation)
Topic Diversity – All Stories

Topic Diversity:	**WTLV** **(Pre)**	**FCN** **(Post)**
	% of Stories	**% of Stories**
Crime/Accidents/Incidents	28	21
Consumer/Health/Science & Technology	21	17
Entertainment/Human Interest/Sports & Rec	17	18
Economics/Military	8	9
Government/Politics/Construction/Growth	7	20
Non-Dominant Groups	6	1
Public Safety	6	2
Education/Parenting/Family/Religion	4	4
Traffic	3	2
Weather & Disasters	2	1
Other/Unable	1	4
(Valid Cases)	(359)	(328)

NOTE: Column totals may exceed 100% due to rounding.
$\chi^2 = 54.651$, df = 10, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = .282, $p < .001$.

Range of Local Topics: The previous comparison between WTLV and FCN on topic diversity included all news stories – local, state, national, and international. Again, while this is a measure of a station's choices of what to include in its newscasts, equally important is the proportion of stories and time spent on locally-generated stories. As in the previous analysis, a comparison of WTLV and FCN shows significant differences between the two stations when it comes to local topic selection (Table 13).[45] Most striking was the dramatic increase in government, politics, growth, and construction coverage. Whereas only 3% of WTLV's coverage involved these topics, 22% of FCN

[45] According to adjusted residual analysis, four areas of coverage contributed most to those differences.

coverage focused on such issues. In large part, these differences can be attributed to two high-profile, local stories: (1) the grand opening of the city's new Memorial Coliseum; and (2) the construction of the city's new courthouse.

Table 7:13: WTLV v FCN (Pre-Post Consolidation)
Topic Diversity – Locally-Produced Stories

Topic Diversity:	WTLV (Pre)	FCN (Post)
	% of Stories	% of Stories
Crime/Accidents/Incidents	24	22
Consumer/Health/Science & Technology	18	15
Entertainment/Human Interest/Sports & Rec	17	15
Public Safety	11	3
Traffic	7	6
Education/Parenting/Family/Religion	7	7
Non-Dominant Groups	7	1
Other/Unable	6	10
Government/Politics/Construction/Growth	3	22
(Valid Cases)	(146)	(193)

Note: Column totals may exceed 100% due to rounding
$\chi^2 = 41.898$, df = 8, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = .352, $p < .001$

Although the earlier analysis of all stories suggested that FCN had decreased the amount of coverage devoted to crime, accidents and incidents, a review of Table 12 shows that is not the case when it comes to local coverage. In a one-to-one analysis, locally, the amount of crime coverage stayed relatively constant (24% versus 22%).

Adjusted residual analysis shows two other topic categories contributed substantially to the shift in local topic coverage. Compared to WTLV, FCN covered significantly fewer stories about public safety. This may be attributed to a large number of stories in 2000 dealing with significant safety concerns atop a highly-traveled downtown bridge – a problem which engineers had largely resolved by 2003. FCN also covered significantly fewer stories about non-dominant groups. Again, it appears coverage of a single story in 2000 by WTLV might be affecting the results – a methodological concern which will be addressed in detail in the following chapter.

Diversity: Lead Story Topics: Decisions about what topics were worthy of "lead" stories did change between 2000 and 2003. Because each station has twenty newscasts in the study, and expected frequencies in the topic categories were insufficient to run a chi-square analysis, the author cannot say the following differences are significant. Descriptively, however, First Coast News led with stories about crime, accidents and incidents half as often as WTLV (4 versus 8) and ran fewer lead stories about public safety (1 versus 7). FCN began its newscasts more frequently with government, politics, construction, and growth (6 versus 1). It also led with Entertainment/Human Interest/Sports & Recreation more frequently, largely due to the coverage of Michael Jackson's arrest on sexual assault charges.

Diversity: Range of Voices: While the range of topics shifted significantly, the number and diversity of sources did not change. Again, television stations do not necessarily have control over the range of sources provided via feed/wire material. They can, however, directly control who they speak with in their local communities. WTLV interviewed 173 local sources on air in the year 2000. First Coast News spoke with 180 people. The number of minority sources increased from 32 to 35 and the number of female sources decreased from 76 to 67 sources. The Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples shows, however, those differences were not significant (p=.35). In other words, the diversity of local voices did not change significantly during the pre-consolidation post-consolidation comparison.

Diversity Summary: RQ3 asked whether the combined resources of two television stations translated into increased diversity. To answer the research question, range of topics, lead stories, and range of sources were compared for WTLV and FCN. The pre-post consolidation comparison tracked changes at the same station from two distinct points in time – 2000 and 2003. Results show significant differences in several topic categories. The most dramatic shift was seen in the significant increase in government, politics, construction, and growth coverage at FCN – a difference seen in both overall and local coverage analysis. Coverage in this category increased 13% and 9% respectively. Public safety stories and the coverage of non-dominant groups decreased significantly, however, between 2000 (WTLV) and 2003 (FCN). Again, this difference was seen in both overall and local story analyses.

The issue of spot news coverage deserves special attention. When all stories were analyzed, results show FCN significantly decreased its coverage of crime, accidents, and incidents. However, when local stories were isolated for examination, a different picture emerged. Results show no such decrease for local news coverage. In other words, crime, accident, and incident coverage remained constant between WTLV and FCN at the local level. Approximately one-quarter of local news stories were dedicated to these topics, both pre- and post-consolidation. These results suggest the decrease seen in the "overall" analysis was driven largely by a decline in the number spot news stories which came from outside the DMA - state, national, and international.

The choice of lead story topics also shifted between WTLV and FCN. First Coast News began its newscasts more often with government, politics, construction, and growth and less often with spot news (crime, accidents, and incidents). Entertainment/Human Interest/Sports & Recreation also took the lead more often at FCN than at WTLV. Regarding the range of voices included in stories, there were no significant differences between WTLV and FCN. In other words, FCN did not include more local sources, women, or minorities in their newscasts.

Localism: Covering the Local Community & Allocating Resources

RQ4: Did the combined resources of two television stations translate into increased localism?

To answer the research question, the geographic focus of news coverage was compared between WTLV and FCN, as was the proportion of stories and amount of time dedicated to local coverage. Localism was also measured in terms of resource allocation. Hypotheses regarding the geographic diversity of local coverage, use of reporters, and amount of enterprise reporting were tested.

Geographic Focus of News Coverage: The geographic focus of news coverage shifted significantly between WTLV and FCN. Most striking was a dramatic increase in local news coverage. As Table 14 illustrates, at WTLV in 2000, 41% of news stories were local. By 2003, that number had risen to 59% - nearly a 20% increase. WTLV ran 146 local stories compared to FCN's 193. To accommodate the increase in local news, FCN ran significantly fewer state, national, and international stories.

Table 7:14: WTLV v FCN (Pre-Post Consolidation)
Geographic Diversity of All News Coverage

Geographic Location:	WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)	FCN (Post-Consolidation)
	% of Stories	% of Stories
Local	41	59
State	19	10
National/Intl	40	30
(Valid Cases)	(359)	(328)

Note: Columns may not total 100% due to rounding
X^2 = 29.204, df = 3, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = .206, $p < .001$

The change in geographic focus was also reflected in a significant decrease in the use of wire, feed, and affiliate services used in the station's newscasts. 58% of the stories aired by WTLV came from such sources compared to only 39% at First Coast News (χ^2 = 27.312, df = 2, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = .200; $p < .001$).

Not only did the *proportion* of local news stories increase significantly, the amount of *time* allocated to local coverage also increased. 63% of WTLV's news time was allocated to local news coverage compared to 75% at FCN (Table 15).

Table 7:15: WTLV v FCN (Pre-Post Consolidation)
Allocation of Local Newscast Time

Newscast Time:	WTLV		FCN	
	Total Seconds	% of Time	Total Seconds	% of Time
Total Time – News	16,744	100	18,522	100
News – Local	10,467	63	13,809	75
News – Non-Local (State, Natl, Intl.)	6,277	38	4,713	26

Note: Column totals may exceed 100% due to rounding

H3: Compared to pre-consolidation WJXX, post-consolidation FCN did not maintain a commitment to coverage in South Georgia.

Given its lack of history in the South Georgia market, it was hypothesized that First Coast News would not maintain WJXX's commitment to the South Georgia market. This hypothesis was partially supported. When one compares the geographic diversity of coverage between WJXX (before consolidation) and FCN (after consolidation), results show FCN is doing significantly fewer South Georgia stories (Table 16). Where 14% (or 18) of WJXX's local stories involved this region of the market, only 4% (or 8 stories) from FCN did the same. This was a significant decrease compared to what WJXX had been doing before consolidation.

Table 7:16: WJXX v FCN (Pre-Post Consolidation)
Geographic Diversity of Local Coverage

Geographic Location:	**WJXX (Allbritton: Pre-Consolidation)**	**FCN (Gannett: Post-Consolidation)**
	% of Stories	**% of Stories**
Core DMA	78%	78%
Expanded–FL	3%	13%
Expanded–GA	14%	4%
Entire DMA	5%	5%
(Valid Cases)	(129)	(193)

Note: $\chi^2 = 17.642$, df = 3, $p < .001$; Cramer's V = 234, $p < .001$

While FCN did not maintain its coverage of South Georgia, it did expand coverage in the region compared to what WTLV was doing, pre-consolidation. Chi-square analysis shows a significant shift in local coverage between WTLV and FCN. The number of stories from the "Expanded-GA" category quadrupled from 1% (or 2 stories) to 4% (or 8 stories). Adjusted residual analysis shows, however, that these differences between the two stations in this particular portion of the community were not significant. FCN did, however, significantly expand its coverage of communities to the south and west of the DMA ($\chi^2 = 10.859$, df = 3, $p < .05$; Cramer's V = .179, $p <$ 05). Where 6% (or 8) of WTLV's stories came from the "Expanded-FL" portion of the DMA, 13% (or 25) of FCN's coverage came from this area. To some degree, the shift can be attributed to FCN's decision to create a "Southern Bureau," responsible for covering communities to the south of Jacksonville where the market's population (and number of potential viewers) was expanding.

Local Resource Allocation: Local resource allocation was measured by the amount of enterprise reporting, the presence of reporters on local stories, and the delivery method of those stories.

H4: Compared to pre-consolidation WTLV, post-consolidation FCN did not allocate more reporters to local coverage.

It was hypothesized that FCN would not allocate more reporters to local coverage compared to WTLV. The hypothesis was supported. There was no significant increase in the proportion of stories delivered by reporters (*p*=.93). 47% of WTLV's local news stories were covered by reporters compared to 46% at FCN. Additionally, while the amount of stories delivered "live" in the field increased from 35% at WTLV to 48% at FCN, this difference was not statistically significant (*p*=.25).

H5: Compared to pre-consolidation WTLV, post-consolidation FCN did not devote more resources to enterprise reporting.

The hypothesis that FCN would not devote more resources to enterprise reporting was only partially supported. The results differ depending upon the method of analysis. According to the chi-square test of independent samples, FCN produced significantly fewer enterprise stories than WTLV. The difference is in the opposite direction as one might expect if the station were channeling more resources into the local newscasts. Table 17 shows FCN allocated just 15% of its stories to specialized stories during the ratings period under examination compared to 23% at WTLV.

Table 7:17: WTLV v FCN (Pre-Post Consolidation)
Enterprise Reporting

Type of Coverage:	**WTLV (Pre-Consolidation)**	**FCN (Post-Consolidation)**
	% of Stories	**% of Stories**
"Day Of"	77	85
Enterprise	23	15
(Valid Cases)	(128)	(145)

Note: $\chi^2 = 3.873$, df = 1, $p < .05$; Cramer's V = .107, $p < .05$

A different view arises, however, when the amount of time dedicated to enterprise reporting is analyzed. In 2000, WTLV dedicated 19% of its coverage to enterprise reporting. That number increased to 23% at FCN in 2003. It would appear that, while FCN was doing fewer enterprise stories, those stories were, in fact, longer.

Finally, there was a shift in the *topics* of enterprise stories included in FCN's newscasts. Since there were only 29 enterprise stories produced, a chi-square test could not be conducted by topic category. Descriptively, however, compared to WTLV, FCN chose to produce more stories on government/politics/growth/construction (2 versus 0) as well as education/parenting/family/religion (4 versus 1). Compared to WTLV, FCN aired far fewer stories on Entertainment/Human Interest/Sports & Recreation (3 versus 9). FCN broadcast no enterprise stories on the subject of crime/accidents/incidents where WTLV ran 4. The coverage of consumer/health stories was relatively constant. It appears this was the favorite topic both pre- and post-consolidation. WTLV and FCN both aired 16 stories dedicated to consumer and health news – far more than any other topic category. As noted earlier, this is not surprising given that a key anchor at WTLV covers the "health beat" and another high-profile reporter investigates consumer complaints and issues for the station's "12 On Your Side" franchise.

Localism Summary: RQ4 asked whether the combined resources of two television stations translated into increased localism. Depending upon the variable being measured, evidence is mixed. Results show the amount of stories and time dedicated to local news increased significantly from WTLV in 2000 to FCN in 2003 – both in the number of stories and the amount of time dedicated to local coverage. The number of local news stories increased nearly 20% and the amount of time dedicated to local news rose 12%. When covering local communities, FCN did not maintain WJXX's level of commitment to the South Georgia region. Compared to WTLV, FCN did, however, significantly expand its coverage of communities to the south and west where the market's population (and number of potential viewers) was expanding. Regarding resource allocation, compared to WTLV, FCN did not increase the number of local reporters featured on the air or significantly change the way in which those stories were presented (live, in the station, or as "straight packages"). While the number of enterprise stories decreased at FCN, the amount of time dedicated to enterprise stories increased, meaning that FCN was producing fewer, but longer enterprise stories.

CHAPTER 8:
Discussion

In 1999, the Federal Communications Commission changed the Local Television Ownership Rule, allowing a single company to own two television stations in the same local media market (or Designated Market Area). This longitudinal case study analyzed the newscasts of one of the nation's first so-called duopolies. Using a quasi-experimental research design, the author sought to discover what kind of long-term impact ownership consolidation had on television news content in Jacksonville, Florida.

To understand the impact of local television ownership consolidation, first, the content from two competing television stations was compared when those stations were owned by separate companies. Before consolidation, WJXX (the ABC affiliate) was owned by Allbritton Communications and WTLV (the NBC affiliate) was owned by Gannett Co., Incorporated. More than three years after consolidation, First Coast News, which represented the merged news operations of WJXX with WTLV, was compared with WTLV's pre-consolidation newscasts. The analysis of newscasts before and after consolidation set out to answer the question: Do the combined resources of two television stations translate into higher quality local coverage?

In many respects, the research design replicates studies published by McCombs on newspaper content in 1987 and 1988, only this study adapted that research to address issues particular to broadcast news. By using the public airwaves, broadcast media are held to a higher standard than newspapers (*AP v US*; *Red Lion v. FCC*). They are required to serve the public's best interest – interests historically defined through the concepts of diversity and localism. This dissertation sought to quantify and empirically measure those concepts. Diversity was measured as range of topics, topic of "lead" stories, and range of voices. Localism was measured as the amount of locally-produced news, the geographic diversity of coverage *within* the Designated Market Area, the number of reporters featured, and the amount of enterprise reporting.

A total of 60 newscasts and 1,048 stories were content analyzed. The unit of analysis was a news story. In addition to diversity and localism measures, the researcher coded each story for several variables common to television news studies, including: order of appearance in the newscast, segment in which story appeared, length, source of material, and story format. Each newscast was also coded for pertinent variables, such as total time allotted to weather, sports, and commercials.

WJXX versus WTLV (Pre-Consolidation Comparison)

<u>Summary of Findings</u>

<u>Overview:</u> Before consolidation, the newscasts produced at WJXX and WTLV looked different in many ways. Compared to WTLV, WJXX aired more news and fewer commercials. 55% of WJXX's total newscast time was dedicated to news compared to 45% at WTLV. Despite the fact that the stations varied in the amount of time spent on news, they aired an almost identical number of stories – 361 and 359 respectively. The

presentation style was often quite different, however. WJXX spent significantly more time running longer, pre-packaged stories whereas WTLV was more likely to edit their stories into shorter versions.

Diversity: There were significant differences between WJXX and WTLV when it came to the range of topics, lead stories, and range of sources included in their newscasts. Regarding topic categories, when all stories were examined, WJXX ran significantly more stories on entertainment, human interest, and sports and recreation as well as government, politics, construction, and growth whereas WTLV focused more heavily on coverage of crime, accidents, and incidents. At the local level, however, both stations featured the same amount of so-called "spot" news. Among locally-produced stories, WJXX was more likely to cover government, politics, growth and construction whereas WTLV devoted more of their coverage to consumerism, health, and science & technology. The two stations were also dramatically different in their choice of lead stories and inclusion of local sources. Compared to WJXX, WTLV included significantly more local sources, women, and minorities in their newscasts.

Localism: Results show the two stations differed on virtually every variable examined. WTLV covered nearly twice as much local news as WJXX. When it came to local coverage, both stations focused primarily on the "Core DMA" – areas closest to the Jacksonville's city center. Given its historic connections to the South Georgia market, as hypothesized, WJXX was significantly more likely than WTLV to cover stories from this region of the DMA. Finally, compared to WJXX, WTLV was significantly more likely to dedicate reporters to their newscasts and to feature those reporters "live" (either from the field or the station). WTLV was also significantly more likely to include "enterprise" reporting in their coverage.

Discussion of Findings

The two, pre-consolidation stations differed on virtually every variable measured. Overall, WTLV was far more likely to cover the local community – including more local news time, reporters, more local sources, and a greater variety of newscast presentation styles – whereas WJXX frequently relied on material provided to the station through its affiliate services. In addition, qualitative examination of the newscast content shows WJXX regularly repeated stories from newscast to newscast, sometimes airing the exact same version of the story at 5, 6, and 11 p.m.

Taken together, the data might imply that WJXX was doing a mediocre job of serving public interests in Jacksonville before consolidation. Although the station was covering more "hard" stories at the local level (e.g., government, politics, growth), the majority of its news product was pieced together from material provided by outside entities. Deregulation supporters could easily interpret such evidence as proof that ownership consolidation in Jacksonville would do no harm to localism or diversity. Such an assessment would be premature.

Certainly, the lack of time spent on locally-produced news could be considered a "quality" concern. Again, only one-third (34%) of WJXX's newscast time was spent on local news compared to nearly two-thirds (63%) at WTLV. However, much of WTLV's local news focused on crime, accidents, and incidents. In fact, if time spent covering local spot news was eliminated from the analysis altogether, the gulf between WJXX and WTLV on local news coverage would narrow (to 27% and 50% respectively).

Regarding the newscasts overall, it is true that much of WJXX's coverage consisted of state, national, and international feed material. This does not mean, however, that the stories were irrelevant to the local community. In fact, one-quarter (25%) of the feed material run by WJXX was considered to be "non-local with local impact" versus 19% of the stories at WTLV. WJXX producers regularly ran issue-oriented stories from the feeds which directly impacted local residents, such as how to pay for a child's college education or how to protect your child from predators on the internet. In other words, simply counting the number of "locally produced" stories and calling that proof of "quality" does not tell the whole story.

On the other hand, one could look at the total amount of time spent on news versus weather, sports, and commercials and conclude that WJXX was doing a better job than WTLV in serving public interests. Again, the data is somewhat deceiving. 55% of WJXX's newscasts were spent on news compared to 45% at WTLV. This does not mean that WJXX was necessarily delivering a higher "quality" product. The difference in the stations' respective "news holes" can largely be attributed to WJXX's newcomer status to the market. Allbritton had been producing news in Jacksonville for only two years at the time it was sold to Gannett. Because it had yet to establish itself as a ratings competitor, the station appeared to be selling fewer commercial "spots." Over time, growing ratings would likely have translated to higher advertising prices and WJXX would likely have sold more commercials (thereby reducing its "news hole").

The issue of longevity in the market is key to the pre-consolidation analysis. Allbritton put WJXX's newscasts on the air just two years before the station was sold. WJXX came to compete in a local media market long-dominated by two television stations. Both WLTV and the city's CBS affiliate (WJXT) had been covering local news since the early 1950s. They had well-established relationships with local viewers, newsmakers, institutions, and advertisers – not to mention a core of seasoned anchors, reporters, photographers, assignment managers, and producers who had been working in the market for years. While several staff members at WJXX were hired away from other stations in Jacksonville, the majority came from outside the market. One could say that WTLV had a significant head-start on quality. Its larger focus on local news, greater reliance on local sources (including women and minorities) and stronger coverage of "enterprise" stories are perhaps evidence of that.

Despite a considerable competitive disadvantage, many industry experts in the market felt WJXX had made a good start. Ironically, at the time the duopoly was approved by the FCC, WJXX appeared to be progressing – both in the ratings and in the hearts and minds of some news viewers. The Allbritton station was enjoying some of its best ratings ever (Patton, 1999b). Many former and current journalists and media managers in the Jacksonville area believed WJXX brought a much-needed alternative voice to the local news scene and was doing a good job covering the local community (Patton, 1999b). One might wonder whether, without deregulation, the overall ability of

WJXX to compete in the market and deliver more diverse and more local newscasts might have naturally improved over time.

That was not allowed to happen, however. Shortly after the data comparing WJXX and WTLV was collected, Gannett officially purchased WJXX. By March of 2000, the two stations were managed by the same owner. To decrease duplication of resources and overhead costs, Gannett immediately eliminated the news operation at WJXX in favor of simultaneously broadcasting a newly-created newscast on both stations. First Coast News was born.

WTLV versus FCN (Pre-Post Consolidation Comparison)

After Gannett purchased WJXX, the ABC affiliate's news operation was dismantled. Equipment and personnel were relocated and absorbed into the existing facilities at WTLV. Gannett constructed a new set to feature the newly-combined, First Coast News operation. Designers built the set into the existing newsroom facility at WTLV, to give the presentation of news a more "active" feel than the previous studio-enclosed set. In many ways, the new anchor set closely resembled the look of the set at WJXX before the sale. But what other changes took place in the nearly four years after Gannett created this duopoly?

Summary of Findings

Overview: A comparison between WTLV and FCN found the amount of time allocated to news coverage increased slightly. In 2000, WTLV devoted 45% of its newscasts to actual news content compared to 50% at FCN. The difference can mostly be attributed to a decrease in sports coverage stemming from Gannett's decision to drop sports from its 5:30 p.m. newscast. While the time allotted to news increased, the number of stories included in newscasts decreased, suggesting FCN ran fewer, but longer stories. There was virtually no difference, however, in the presentation of news stories as story formats remained virtually the same between WTLV and FCN.

Diversity: There were significant differences between WTLV and FCN when it came to the range of topics and lead stories included in their newscasts. Regarding topic categories, results show a significant shift, the most dramatic being an increase in government, politics, construction, and growth coverage at FCN – a difference seen in both overall and local coverage analysis. Public safety stories and the coverage of non-dominant groups decreased significantly, however, between 2000 (WTLV) and 2003 (FCN). Again, this difference was seen in both overall and local story analyses. At first glance, it also appears that FCN significantly decreased spot news coverage. This decrease is demonstrated when all news stories are analyzed but results show no such change at the local level. In other words, crime, accident, and incident coverage at the local level remained constant at approximately 25%. It appears, then, that the decrease seen in "overall" spot news was driven largely by a decline in the number of crime, accident, and incident stories from outside the DMA - state, national, and international.

Other evidence suggests that an effort to decrease its focus on spot news was being made, however. When lead stories were examined, FCN began its newscasts less often with crimes, accidents and incidents and more often with government, politics, construction, and growth – a positive step by many public interest standards. Regarding the range of voices included in stories, however, there were no significant differences between WTLV and FCN. FCN was no more likely to include local sources, women, or minorities in their newscasts than WTLV.

Localism: Heading into the pre-post consolidation analysis of localism, the author wondered whether the combined resources of two television stations translated into increased localism. Evidence was mixed depending upon the variable under examination. Results show the number of stories and amount of time dedicated to local news increased significantly from WTLV in 2000 to FCN in 2003 – both in the number of stories (up 20%) and the amount of time dedicated to local coverage (up 12%). There was also a significant shift in the coverage of local communities within the DMA. FCN decreased its coverage of the core market and significantly increased its coverage of communities to the south and west. As hypothesized, however, results show FCN did not maintain WJXX's level of commitment to the South Georgia region.

Regarding resource allocation, compared to WTLV, FCN did not significantly increase the number of local reporters featured on the air. The last variable examined involves "enterprise" reporting. It was hypothesized that, compared to WTLV, FCN would not increase the amount of in-depth, investigative, or station-oriented special projects. The hypothesis was only partially supported. The number of enterprise stories actually decreased significantly at FCN. However, the amount of time dedicated to enterprise stories increased, meaning that FCN produced fewer, but longer enterprise stories.

Discussion of Findings

In the pre-post consolidation analysis, definite differences could be seen between WTLV in 2000 and First Coast News in 2003. Among the most striking was the shift in topic coverage. Data show, for example, that, compared to WTLV, FCN significantly decreased its coverage of spot news and increased its coverage of government, politics, growth, and construction. Simultaneously, public safety and non-dominant group coverage declined significantly. This author is unsure of the data's reliability, however. Before discussing the findings any further, this issue demands special attention.

For this study, the author made certain methodological decisions which may be affecting the pre-post consolidation analysis. In particular, two methodological shortcomings could be affecting the outcome. The first issue involves how the data are being compared. In the year 2000, newscasts were recorded from WJXX and WTLV for the same week (Monday, February 7 – Friday, February 11). Generally-speaking, both stations were competing head to-head, choosing from among the same general pool of news stories.[46] Therefore, any differences discovered when comparing topic selection between the two stations should be due to decision-making policies and practices within their respective newsrooms. For example, in February of 2000, a large rally was held in Florida's Capitol to decry a change in the state's affirmative action policies. Both stations were in a position to cover the event. A choice to cover or not cover the story – which significantly affected African Americans in the state – would be reflected in the topic analysis. In other words, a direct comparison of topic diversity was possible. The same cannot be said for the pre-post consolidation analysis. The comparison between WTLV and FCN involves two different time periods. The universe of available news stories was, of course, different in 2000 versus 2003. Therefore, it is possible that differences found between WTLV and FCN on topic diversity are driven by that factor versus the impact of consolidation.

Another methodological choice may be affecting the analysis as well. The research design involved the collection of a continuous week's worth of data from each station under examination. By comparing topics from 2000 against topics in 2003, it is possible that certain, high-profile stories drove some of the differences on topic diversity. The increase in government, politics, construction and growth is a good example. In 2003, Jacksonville's newly constructed arena opened downtown. The arena is, literally, in FCN's backyard. The station dedicated a significant amount of news coverage to the arena throughout the week and especially on opening night, contributing to the increase

[46] This is true most of the time. However, it can be expected that the topics of "enterprise" should be different between stations. Target demographics are frequently different between ABC and NBC affiliates and competitive strategies often call for the production of different topics by competing stations.

in growth and construction topics. The decrease in public safety coverage was also likely affected by a single story. In 2000, WTLV heavily featured "Continuing Coverage" of safety problems on a busy, downtown bridge. The problem was largely resolved by 2003. It is possible to claim that other public safety concerns had arisen by 2003 – concerns which were not addressed in any significant way by FCN. However, it is impossible to know whether that was, in fact, the case.

As a result of these two methodological issues, it is possible the data on topic diversity are unreliable. In future research, a single methodological shift could address both problems. Instead of using actual weeks of data, researchers could use a constructed (or "composite") week. In this sample, for example, some stories received coverage several days in a row. By randomly selecting newscasts from different days of the week over the period of a month, theoretically, researchers could reduce the chances of any one story unduly skewing the results.[47]

While it is true that methodological problems may be affecting the reliability of the data, the problems do not preclude a discussion of the pre-post consolidation comparison of topic diversity. When examining locally-produced stories, it is unlikely that the significant increase of government, politics, construction, and growth topics was due to the arena opening story alone. Compared to WTLV, which covered these stories

[47] According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998), "sampling studies to find valid and efficient sampling methods for television news are practically non-existent" (p. 99). They do discuss the idea in relation to *network* news programming, however. They cite a study, conducted by Riffe, Lacy, Nagovan, and Burkum (1996) which found the most efficient form of sampling for network television news was randomly selecting two days from each month of a year for a total of 24 days (Cited in Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, p. 100). Such a large sample is not generally possible in local TV studies, however. Network news is recorded and archived in several locations, including the Vanderbilt University Archives. No such national database exists for local news.

only 3% of the time, 22% of FCN's stories dealt with these topics. This is a dramatic (and laudable) increase. Also laudable is the decrease, albeit slight, in the coverage of spot news at the local level (from 24% to 22%). According to a recent report called "The State of the News Media," produced by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, these figures are below the national average for local television news stations across America ("State of the News Media: Local TV," 2004, p. 4).

The significant decrease in non-dominant group coverage, though, is of considerable concern. 7% of WTLV's coverage (in 2000) involved non-dominant groups compared to less than 1% at First Coast News (in 2003). Non-dominant group stories were coded as issues specifically affecting racial and ethnic minorities, women, the economically disadvantaged, seniors, and teenagers – groups which rarely receive substantial media coverage. Census figures show approximately half of the region's population is female and approximately 40% of Jacksonville's population is a racial or ethnic minority. In fact, the number of African Americans living in the city is more than double the national average. Still, less than 1% of FCN's coverage addressed issues of specific concern to these demographic groups. With the exception of health news, the specific coverage of women's issues was virtually absent. The station did, however, air a couple of stories on construction and growth on Jacksonville's Northside that focused specifically on African Americans living in that community.

The majority of the station's coverage of non-dominant groups frequently had less to do with issue-oriented coverage and more to do with crimes and incidents. Much of this was more negative in tone. For example, FCN gave a good deal of coverage to the arrest of Hispanic and Latino cable technicians who were working illegally for the phone company. While covering this story, FCN reporters pointed out the dramatic increase in Latino and Hispanic residents (both legal and illegal) in the region in recent years. Yet this was the only story the station ran that week addressing that demographic group. The station also gave coverage to a proposed city ordinance that would lead to the arrest of homeless people who slept on downtown benches but no coverage to the plight of the homeless or needy within the community.

Turning now to issues of localism and local resource allocation, when it comes to the amount of purely *local* news included in newscasts, a significant increase was seen from WTLV to FCN. At WTLV in 2000, 41% of news stories were local. By 2003, that number had risen to 59% - nearly a 20% increase. The increase is striking. While it appears the amount of local coverage is improving, this figure is still well below the national average for local television stations. Research shows, across the country, 75% of news stories are local ("State of the News Media: Local TV," 2004, p. 3). In other words, despite the increase in local coverage in recent years, FCN still under-performs its local duties compared to other stations in the United States.

Earlier, it was mentioned that FCN did not significantly increase the number of local reporters featured on the air. While quantitative analysis shows the actual number of reporter-delivered stories did not increase, other evidence suggests more reporters were "working the streets" for FCN compared to WTLV. A qualitative review of the newscasts shows that, in 2000, nine different reporters and seven different anchors (many of whom served as reporters on occasion) appeared on air for WTLV. By 2003, the number of reporters had increased to twelve. Two more news anchors and a weather anchor were added as well. It is important to note, however, that some of these additional staff members were added for a particular purpose. When Gannett purchased WJXX, WJXX was producing a 7 p.m. newscast in Jacksonville – the only mid-evening newscast in the DMA. After creating the duopoly, Gannett decided to maintain WJXX's commitment to this newscast. As part of its duopoly decisions – Gannett hired anchors, one reporter, and other support staff from WJXX to keep this newscast on the air.[48] It does appear, however, that two additional reporters were added to the staff between 2000 and 2003.

While Gannett maintained WJXX's commitment to this particular newscast, it appears the company did *not* maintain Allbritton's commitment to covering the South Georgia portion of the DMA. Statistical analysis shows, compared to WJXX, the amount of coverage in this region decreased significantly from 2000 to 2003. As discussed in Chapter 5, WJXX had a long-standing history and relationship with citizens in this area. In fact, 14% of their news stories addressed issues affecting this region. Only 4% of FCN's stories directly affected South Georgia viewers. In short, when Gannett purchased WJXX, people living in Brantley, Camden, Charlton, Glynn, Pierce and Ware Counties in Georgia lost an important news provider.

An analysis of the geographic diversity of local coverage presents many difficult issues. Despite WJXX/Allbritton's history, one might ask whether Gannett/FCN has any

[48] Again, in the year 2000, when the duopoly was created, the author was working for WTLV (the Gannett-owned station). Information regarding the hiring of anchors and reporters stems from information she learned while working in the newsroom and from conversations (both formal and informal) with newsroom employees and mangers.

need to maintain that commitment or even whether that commitment is in the public's best interests. Some might say no. Although six South Georgia counties are part of the DMA, fewer than 190,000 people live there. The area is sparsely populated compared to more than 500,000 residents living in the Florida counties to Jacksonville's west and south. It could certainly be argued that Gannett serves the greater community's best interests by covering the most populous regions in its DMA. It appears that is the approach taken by Gannett in this case.

Instead of maintaining coverage to the north, FCN expanded its news coverage to the south and west (in the so-called "Expanded-FL" region). It can be assumed that FCN/Gannett perceived the need to cover this region more often because of the potential for attracting new viewers who lived in this part of the DMA. More cynically, since Nielsen Media Research places its meters (audience measurement devices) based on population figures, it is possible FCN simply took advantage of the meter placement in hopes of improving ratings and raising revenues. Whatever the reason, it is clear that, compared to WJXX and WTLV, FCN significantly expanded coverage of this portion of the DMA.

Finally, we turn to a discussion of enterprise reporting. As opposed to "news of the day" coverage, enterprise reporting involves longer form investigations, in-depth reporting, news series, and the coverage of station projects. Such stories require more time and money to produce. Despite the additional resources achieved through ownership consolidation which Gannett had at its disposal, it was hypothesized that First Coast News would not increase the amount of enterprise reporting included in its newscasts. The author believed Gannett would wish to save money by simply duplicating the same level of enterprise reporting as it was doing in 2000. On this question, results are mixed depending on the method of measurement. When individual stories were counted, results show the amount of enterprise reporting actually decreased significantly from WTLV in 2000 to FCN in 2003. This finding suggests that, not only did Gannett fail to maintain its commitment to enterprise reporting, it cut back even further. FCN allocated just 15% of its stories to specialized stories during the ratings period under examination compared to 23% at WTLV. Measured a different way, analysis of time dedicated to enterprise reporting shows, however, that FCN increased the amount of time dedicated to enterprise reporting, from 19% at WTLV to 23% at FCN. As noted in the previous chapter, it would appear that, while FCN was doing fewer enterprise stories, those stories were, in fact, longer. The findings, while conflicting, substantiate the author's methodological decision to measure, analyze, and compare results based on total number of stories and total amount of time allotted to those stories.

Regardless of measurement method, to those familiar with local news production, results presented here may seem high. Whether it be 15% or 23%, this is a large percentage of the news hole. In fact, the national average for enterprise reporting is 7% ("State of the News Media: Local Television, p. 7). It is important to point out, however, that these findings result from data gathered during ratings periods (versus a typical news day). The author purposefully examined content created during ratings because this is the time when news stations often put their best foot forward.

The preceding discussion of findings would not be complete without briefly addressing some of the issues which went unmeasured in this study but were reflected in a qualitative examination of FCN's news content and station practices. One issue involves technological innovation. Another involves community-oriented service projects. As Aufderheide (1999) points out, one key public interest concern addressed in the *Telecommunications Act of 1996* was technological innovation. By allowing more ownership concentration in the broadcast industry, lawmakers believed they would promote a massive investment in hardware and a faster transition to digital television in local communities (p. 67). They deemed both to be in the public's best interest.

Such technological issues should be addressed, therefore, in the case of First Coast News. For example, in most local media markets, research shows weather is the primary reason people tune in ("State of the News Media: Local News," p. 1). In this particular case study, Gannett significantly enhanced its weather forecasting by keeping WJXX's Doppler radar. Given that weather in Florida is variable and potentially dangerous, the "dual Doppler" capabilities of First Coast News certainly provide a public service. On another technical front, by combining the resources of two stations, Gannett was also able to achieve the digital conversion of its signal more quickly. It is important to keep in mind, however, that when it comes to technology, Gannett also achieved significant economies of scale by eliminating a good deal of it. The company sold off a great deal of equipment as well as the state-of-the-art building in which WJXX was housed. Reportedly, the building alone sold for more than 2.5 million dollars (Scanlan, 2002).

On another public interest front, industry experts might argue that this study failed to measure the "good deeds" Gannett does in the local Jacksonville community. According to the National Association of Broadcasters, broadcast stations across America contribute significantly to their communities by airing Public Service Announcements and raising billions of dollars for national and local charities and disaster relief (Jessell, 2004). According to the same article, however, many regulators and public interest advocates do not believe this fulfills broadcasters' public interest obligations. Even Chairman Michael Powell says he's more interested in what programming broadcasters provide to serve communities with the spectrum they receive for free. In addition, many media critics argue such Public Service Announcements rarely, if ever, promote any kind of political or social debate.

Drawing Conclusions

The previous analysis compares Gannett-owned newscasts before and after consolidation. The author set out to answer the question: Do the combined resources of two television stations translate into higher quality local coverage? Free market supporters suggest economies of scale would help create higher quality coverage that would be more diverse and more local. Public trustee supporters argue that ownership consolidation privileges commercial concerns above democratic necessities.

Results from this study indicate consolidation *may* translate to higher quality coverage in some content areas but not others. Compared to pre-consolidation newscasts, the duopoly (FCN) increased the amount of news overall as well as the amount of purely local news. It expanded its coverage in some communities (but not others). It significantly shifted the diversity of topic coverage in certain areas in ways that could be considered positive and ways that could be considered negative. It did not increase the number of local sources, women, or minorities included in news coverage. While three reporters and two anchors were added to the staff between 2000 (WTLV) and 2003 (FCN), there was no accompanying increase in the number of stories delivered on air by reporters. Finally, when analyzing the total number of stories dedicated to enterprise reporting, the duopoly's commitment to long-form and specialized news coverage actually decreased (although the length of stories increased).

Based on the mixed results from this study, free market supporters would likely argue there is no proof that ownership consolidation actually *harms* the quality of local television news. Additionally, in the view of the court, even inconclusive evidence can be used to support a deregulatory claim (*Prometheus v. FCC*, p. 82-83). This author presents an alternative view. Because this study examined only two owners in one market in one state, there is too little evidence to conclude that increased ownership consolidation in local television markets, in fact, serves the public's best interests. By way of the *Telecommunications Act*, the FCC is obliged to determine whether media ownership rules are "necessary in the public interest." Using the "plain public interest standard" put forth by the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals in *Prometheus v. FCC*, there is evidence to suggest that continued regulation in this area of media ownership policy remains "useful" or "helpful" to the greater goals of society.

Even so, there are practical matters to consider. More than ever before, broadcasters are competing for audiences and revenues. Technological advances have produced new competitors, including cable, Internet, and digital satellite providers. Large industry groups and free-market supporters are likely to take the Federal Communications Commission to court to force further deregulation. In light of the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeal's recent ruling (*Prometheus*), the FCC must re-examine its policies, which brings us, finally, to the ways in which the present research study can be applied to future policy decisions.

Strengths, Opportunities, & Policy Implications

This research attempts to provide fresh evidence in the debate over U.S. media policy. As opposed to examining source or programming diversity, it empirically analyzes the impact of consolidation on actual content. In recent years, researchers like Owens et al. (2003) and Spavins et al. (2002) have used awards and ratings as proxies for content but these methods are highly problematic (Smith, 2003). A study conducted by Chambers, Reeves, and Harp comes closer to studying the impact of duopolies on local news content (2001). In *Story Duplication in New Television News Management Models*, the authors compared story duplication (or consonance) for stations involved in "shared service agreements" (or Local Marketing Agreements), where one station produces news for another station. Like the present study, these authors employed a case study approach. This study takes that research one step further in an effort to fill the "empirical vacuum" that exists on local television ownership consolidation (Napoli, 2001, p. 3).

Strengths

A case study and quasi-field experiment, this dissertation is the first research of its kind. As such, it has strengths and weaknesses. The limitations of the research have already been addressed in detail. They will not be revisited here. Instead, looking toward the future in pursuit of stronger policy, theory, and methodology, it is important to build upon its strengths, of which there are five, including the study's: (1) research design; (2) focus on content; (3) methodological innovation; (4) practical use of a research opportunity; and (5) effort to operationally define issues of diversity and localism in the context of local television news policy research.

Research Design: This research combines a case study approach with quasi-experimental design. The combination is a significant strength. This study first examined news content when two TV stations were owned by separate companies. Then, it examined news content after the stations were consolidated under one company. To this author's knowledge, it is the first study to examine the impact of a duopoly on diversity and localism. The research design is one of its greatest strengths.

Focus on Content: A second strength is this study's use of actual content as a means of examining ownership consolidation. Unlike other methods, such as participant observation, it directly examines the product produced by consolidated ownership. This is not to say that more cannot be learned by talking to the news workers and managers involved in the duopoly. Certainly, such information could be useful and enlightening. As the Chinese Proverb goes, however, "The palest ink is better than the best memory" (Origin Unknown). Studying content can be tricky business, however. Free market supporters argue that media policy decisions based on actual content step dangerously close to violating the First Amendment. Jurists deciding on media policy seem conflicted over the matter. In *Prometheus,* the court cautioned against making content-distinguishing judgments" (p. 69). However, those same judges did not *preclude* using content. In fact, they relied upon content-based research when they ruled on cross-ownership deregulation, even when its methodology was highly contested (See Footnote 24, p. 50). In the end, the court ruled that: "We must ensure … the (FCC) examined the relevant data and articulated a satisfactory explanation for its action, including a "rational connection between the facts found and the choices made" (*Prometheus*, p. 30).

Methodological Innovation: A third strength of this study involves its attempt at methodological innovation. In many television news studies, researchers only count the number of stories. They do not measure the length of those stories. This research sought to determine how competing methods might produce alternative results. For example, if one only relied on the total "count" of enterprise stories, it would look as if First Coast News decreased its enterprise reporting. By measuring length of time allocated to this coverage, however, a different finding emerged. In newspaper research, the debate over counting versus measuring is long-settled. As early as 1967, Budd, Thorp and Donohew compared column inch measures with article counts for content analyses in eight different newspapers and found the two to be highly correlated (p. 35). No such comparison has been made for television news. And because the amount of air time is so restricted in television, the amount of time spent on stories is highly relevant.

Seizing a Research Opportunity: A fourth strength of this study involves the author's attempt to seize on a research opportunity. She was working for Gannett at their Jacksonville station when the duopoly announcement was made. It became immediately apparent that a research opportunity had arisen. To that end, she recorded a week's worth of newscasts in the market to serve as a base-line for some future comparison. The decision led directly to her ability to conduct the present analysis.

Diversity & Localism Measures: A final research strength is this study's effort to operationally-define and empirically measure diversity and localism in the context of media policy debates. Relying on research conducted by other television news scholars, literature and court rulings on public interest standards, hearings on policy debates, and perspectives on economic and market theory, it attempts to weave a vast body of literature into a workable research design.

Research Opportunities & Policy Prescriptions

In this longitudinal case study, the author empirically measured and operationally defined the ways in which local television ownership consolidation impacted diversity and localism within one specific community. Results indicated consolidation *may* translate to higher quality coverage in some content areas but not others. The findings have implications for both policy makers and media researchers.

To date, the Federal Communications Commission has failed to include in its deliberations the kind of research it needs to make an informed decision about further deregulation. Much more empirical evidence is needed to help us all better understand and address the issue. As Sinha and Stein point out, it is extremely difficult to isolate the effects of ownership and market structures (1995). Still, it is essential that media researchers try.

With further deregulation currently on hold, scholars have a narrow window of opportunity to provide more useful evidence. This study takes a step in that direction but it needs to be replicated in other media markets; small, medium, and large. If several such case studies were conducted, the evidence could be synthesized to make an even stronger empirical case. As Riffe, Lacy, and Fico explain, science is a cumulative process (p. 87). Over time, consistent results from a large number of samples can be combined to create a stronger understanding of the subject under examination (p. 87). Such cumulative data can help overcome the peculiarities of content production associated with geography and market size (Bernstein, Lacy, Cassara, & Lau, 1990; Carroll, 1989).

To help gather stronger empirical evidence, this author proposes a strategy that might help the policy process as it relates to local television ownership. Specifically, she recommends the FCC purse a case-by- case approval process but only in cases where researchers are positioned (in advance) to gather necessary data. For example, the FCC could allow additional duopolies in a limited number of markets on the condition that owners open their doors to researchers, who could then conduct detailed content analyses before and after the sales are completed. Audience surveys could be conducted to ask viewers in markets where duopolies exist what changes they perceive. Researchers could gather data on the decline, if any, of newscasts in communities where duopolies currently exist. To date, this evidence is largely anecdotal but it could become relevant, empirically, if researchers were positioned to ask the right questions. Once several studies were replicated in different geographic regions of the country and among different market sizes (small, medium, and large), the FCC could use the results to inform its future decisions on ownership deregulation.

This is not the only route open to media researchers. Some scholars might argue, for example, that research focusing on ownership consolidation is misplaced. According to market economic theory, substantial product differentiation rarely arises from oligopolistic markets (Albaran, 2002; Turow, 1997). Although local news ownership is moving steadily towards monopolistic conditions, most local news markets usually meet the definition of oligopolies, with a select few stations controlling news production (Gomery, 2000, p. 519; Powers, 2001). According to Turow (1997), "the more alike two companies are in what they make and how they make it, the more fierce their competition is likely to be, because the producers would be competing for very similar, and by nature scarce, resources" (p. 28). In the case of local television, that resource is viewers. Media economic theory suggests, then, that reducing the number of owners in a market from 4 to 3, for example, should have little effect on content.

Such scholars would likely seek to examine forces *beyond* market structure that might affect the quality of local television news content. In other words, they might ask, what besides ownership rules can help create content that is diverse and local (i.e., serves the public interest)? Researcher in this vein would seriously investigate the impact of *non*-market forces on news quality. Scholars could study, for example, the ways in which different tax structures, new methods of spectrum allocation, alternative funding mechanisms for public broadcasting, or revised content regulations (such as ascertainment) might impact content production. Many such proposals were put forth by Fowler and Brenner (1982) in their treatise on media policy published more than two decades ago. Additionally, researchers could compare content production between publicly-held companies and those not traded on the stock market. This entire line of research, based on *non*-market forces, could be highly profitable in future policy decisions.

Implications for Policy Makers

Despite a fragmenting audience, local television continues to be the dominant source of news for most Americans. According to Nielsen Media Research (2002), when asked where they've gone in the past week to find news and information, 92% of Americans report tuning in to local TV news – less than newspapers (79%), radio (68%), the Internet (34%) or magazines (20%). Unlike other information outlets, such as cable and the internet, local television stations distill and synthesize information for the public in ways that help citizens learn about their communities (*Prometheus v. FCC*, 2004, p. 64). Through television, we learn not only about our society but our place in it. Television news serves as a means of connecting communities. It is a shared discourse helping citizens make sense of their worlds. In Schramm's view, "No occupation has a higher public service to perform than to serve man's need to know" (1956, p. 344). Whether by shining a spotlight (Gitlin) or a headlight (McManus), journalism provides something unique to a culture – "independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive information that citizens require to be free" (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001, p. 11).

Media scholars aren't the only ones concerned about the future of news in America. A growing number of journalists are worried about the impact of corporate consolidation and business interests on public discourse. A recent study shows 57% of journalists believe bottom-line pressures are affecting the quality of local news ("State of the Media Report: Journalist Survey," 2004). The number of local media outlets may be increasing but, according to Croteau, in the last 25 years, the number of TV station owners has declined by one-third, a sign, he says, that media ownership (and viewpoint diversity) is becoming more, not less consolidated (2003, p. 2).

The critical ways in which ownership consolidation impacts the quality of local television news content is only beginning to be understood through studies like this one. It has only been five years since the Federal Communications Commission altered local media ownership policy and the empirical examination of consolidation effects in this area are in their infancy.

Additionally, significantly more work needs to be done to refine both the definitions of diversity and localism and methods of measurement. Included in this refinement would be efforts to survey citizens regarding their perspectives on localism and diversity. Above all, researchers should not shy away from content studies which contribute to the scholarly and policy debate.

At the outset of this study, the author recounted the troubling story of a South Dakota town impacted by local radio consolidation. The crisis in Minot has been discussed at the highest levels of American government as a "worst case scenario." While a critical example in the current consolidation debate, this author does not believe it necessarily represents the worst that can happen. Perhaps worse are the long-term injuries consolidation might visit on democracy and cultural knowledge in local communities. Instead of focusing on such anecdotal evidence, lawmakers, policy experts, scholars, and consumer groups need to collect empirical evidence that demonstrates the ways in which ownership consolidation impacts diversity, localism, and our society's best interests.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Jacksonville/Brunswick DMA: Square Miles & Population (2000 U.S. Census Data)

County:	Square Miles:	Population:
Duval	773.67	778,879
Clay	601.11	140,814
St. Johns	609.01	123,135
Putnam	721.89	70,423
Nassau	651.55	57,663
Columbia	797.05	56,513
Bradford	293.13	26,088
Baker	585.21	22,259
Union	240.29	13,442
Florida Total:	5,272.91	1,289,216
Glynn	422.37	67,568
Camden	629.91	43,664
Ware	902.29	35,483
Pierce	343.25	15,636
Brantley	444.40	14,629
Charlton	780.77	10,282
Georgia Total:	3,522.99	187,262
Grand Total:	**8,795.9**	**1,476,478**

APPENDIX B

Jacksonville/Brunswick DMA: Race, Education & Income
(2000 U.S. Census Data)

County:	Race		Education		Median Income
US Average:	**White:**	**75.1%**	**HS:**	**29.1%**	**$41,994**
	African American or Black:	**12.3%**	**Some College:**	**31.7%**	
	Other:	**12.7%***	**Bachelor's:**	**15.0%**	
	Hispanic/Latino:	**12.5%****	**MA, Prof, PhD:**	**6.9%**	
FLORIDA COUNTIES:					
Duval:	White:	65.8%	HS:	29.1%	$40,703
	AA/Black:	27.8%	Some College:	31.7%	
	Other:	3.7%	Bachelor's:	15.0%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	4.1%	MA, Prof, PhD:	6.9%	
Clay:	White:	87.4%	HS:	31.7%	$48,854
	AA/Black:	6.7%	Some College:	34.6%	
	Other:	5.9%	Bachelor's:	13.4%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	4.3%	MA, Prof, PhD:	6.7%	
St. Johns:	White:	90.9%	HS:	24.5%	$50,099
	AA/Black:	6.3%	Some College:	29.6%	
	Other:	2.8%	Bachelor's:	21.8%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	2.6%	MA, Prof, PhD:	11.3%	
Putnam:	White:	77.9%	HS:	37.3%	$28,180
	AA/Black:	17.0%	Some College:	23.6%	
	Other:	5.1%	Bachelor's:	5.8%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	5.9%	MA, Prof, PhD:	3.7%	
Nassau:	White:	90.0%	HS:	34.4%	$46,022
	AA/Black:	7.7%	Some College:	27.7%	
	Other:	1.3%	Bachelor's:	12.3%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	1.5%	MA, Prof, PhD:	6.6%	
Columbia:	White:	79.7%	HS:	34.9%	$30,881
	AA/Black:	17.0%	Some College:	28.9%	
	Other:	3.3%	Bachelor's:	6.9%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	2.7%	MA, Prof, PhD:	4.0%	
Bradford:	White:	76.3%	HS:	40.1%	$33,140

	AA/Black:	20.8%	Some College:	25.6%	
	Other:	2.9%	Bachelor's:	5.1%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	2.4%	MA, Prof, PhD:	3.3%	
Baker:	White:	84.0%	HS:	41.4%	$40,035
	AA/Black:	13.9%	Some College:	22.3%	
	Other:	2.1%	Bachelor's:	5.3%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	1.9%	MA, Prof, PhD:	2.9%	
Union:	White:	73.6%	HS:	38.9%	$34,563
	AA/Black:	22.8%	Some College:	26.1%	
	Other:	3.6%	Bachelor's:	4.8%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	3.5%	MA, Prof, PhD:	2.7%	
GEORGIA COUNTIES:					
Glynn:	White:	70.7%	HS:	29.3%	$38,765
	AA/Black:	26.5%	Some College:	29.2%	
	Other:	2.8%	Bachelor's:	15.1%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	3.0%	MA, Prof, PhD:	8.7%	
Camden:	White:	75.0%	HS:	33.2%	$41,056
	AA/Black:	20.1%	Some College:	34.1%	
	Other:	4.9%	Bachelor's:	10.3%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	3.6%	MA, Prof, PhD:	5.7%	
Ware:	White:	69.7%	HS:	38.8%	$28,360
	AA/Black:	28.0%	Some College:	20.2%	
	Other:	2.3%	Bachelor's:	6.8%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	1.9%	MA, Prof, PhD:	4.6%	
Pierce:	White:	86.9%	HS:	41.2%	$29,895
	AA/Black:	10.9%	Some College:	18.5%	
	Other:	2.2%	Bachelor's:	6.8%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	2.3%	MA, Prof, PhD:	3.3%	
Brantley:	White:	94.4%	HS:	47.7%	$30,361
	AA/Black:	4.0%	Some College:	18.8%	
	Other:	1.6%	Bachelor's:	3.3%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	1.0%	MA, Prof, PhD:	2.9%	
Charlton:	White	68.6%	HS:	42.1%	$27,869
	AA/Black:	29.3%	Some College:	16.6%	
	Other:	2.1%	Bachelor's:	3.4%	
	Hispanic/Latino:	0.8%	MA, Prof, PhD:	3.0%	

Note: (*) "Other" categories for racial demographics include: Asian, American Indian and Alaska native, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, some other race, two or more races.

(**) In the 2000 Census, Hispanic/Latino is not considered a race, but an ethnicity. It is a separate data category and should not be added to race totals.

APPENDIX C

Codebook

V#: VARIABLE DESCRIPTION & INSTRUCTIONS_________________

V1 I.D. Number: ___ ___ ___ ___

(Unit of Measurement for this study is a single story)(Assign unique, four digit number to each story coded)

V2 Date of Newscast ___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___

(dd/mm/yy)(Example: 050199)

V3 Station: (Circle One)

1 WJXX (Channel 25, ABC, Before Duopoly)
2 WTLV (Channel 12, NBC, Before Duopoly)
3 First Coast News (Combined NBC/ABC, After Duopoly)

V4 Time of Newscast: (Circle One)

1=5pm 2 = 530pm 3 = 6pm 4 = 11pm

(We will code newscasts in 1/2 hour increments, even if station promotes 5-6pm as a single hour)

CODING NOTES: Determining what counts as a "story"

Do not code teases, either at the top of the newscast, internally, or at the end of a news block. We will NOT be coding "mega teases" or conglomerate-type teases at the top of the newscast. Code only complete news stories. For example, if anchor teases one story or a series of stories off the top, then goes to another story for a full report (often called an "umbrella lead"), you should code the first FULL report as being story number one. For example, if anchors tease a story and then say something like "We'll have that/those story/stories in a moment, but first…" then code the first full story as the lead story)

If top of the newscast comes to video &/or sound bite (often called a "cold open") then goes to anchor introductions, then to a lead story, but ALL are related, code as a single story. Start the timer at the beginning of the first section of the story and end when story changes.

If the anchor uses a voice over and then transitions into a reporter in the field, you would code this as a single story and start the timer at the beginning of the first section of the story.

Handling Elements: If the story is followed by “tag” information that adds additional information to the preceding story, such as a phone number or helpful information, count all the elements together as one story. If, however, there are two or more different angles of the story which are handled by different reporters, such as “team coverage,” code separately.

If there are several related stories connected in some kind of “world wrap” or “Covering Florida” segment, code each story separately.

Most stations are VERY clever about putting teases into the body of their news blocks to promote later coverage. If, at the end of a story, the anchor says “We’ll have more on this story tonight at 11,” you can include it in the total time. But if the story is, by itself, a tease, even if it includes visual elements, DO NOT code these as stories!

Do code traffic reports if they're scheduled to help commuters know what routes to avoid. However, if station is using a “towercam” shot from its transmission tower as a “bump shot,” (i.e.: just because they can, not because something “serious” or problematic is concerned), do not code as part of the total time OR a traffic story.

Weather: If there is breaking weather news, such as severe weather, DO code this as a story. Do NOT CODE weather if it is a regularly-scheduled part of the newscast. For example, in 5 & 11pm newscasts, it is common for the station to feature their weather anchor in the first block. This is often called “First Weather” and gives a brief look at current conditions and/or a synopsis of today’s weather. Often, this segment “teases” weather later. Again, DO NOT CODE THIS as a story. If WX anchor appears at the end of the block as a “tease” element, do NOT code.

Sports: If there is breaking sports news, such as a development in a city sports franchise, or the arrest of a top athlete, DO code this as a story (whether the sports anchor is involved or not). DO NOT CODE sports teases as part of the newscast/a story. We will also NOT CODE sport stories if they are a regularly-scheduled part of the newscast. For example, in the 11pm newscasts, it is common for Sports Director or anchor to drop in to tease of his/her top story. DO NOT CODE THIS as a story!

Later in the newscast, do not code sports or weather stories unless those stories are delivered by the “news” anchors within those blocks. For example, if meteorologists show video of a storm in Wisconsin, we would NOT code this as a story in the weather block. However, if the anchors read the story, and then pitch to weather, we WOULD code the story.

V#: VARIABLE DESCRIPTION: ___ ______

V5 Story Number: (two digit number) __ __

(Order in which story appears in newscast. Example: First/Lead story = 01; Tenth = 10)
(If it is the very last story in the newscast, code as 99 to reflect "kicker")

V6 Block/Segment of the Newscast in Which Story Falls: (Circle One)

1 A (Between start of newscast and 1st commercial break)(Normally news)
2 B (After 1st commercial break, before 2nd)(Normally news)
3 C (After 2nd commercial break, before 3rd)(Normally news & Weather)
4 D (After 3rd commercial break, before 4th)(Normally news & Sports)
5 E (After 4th commercial break, before 5th)(Normally "kicker" and weather)
6 Other

V7 16 Is the story delivered by a reporter? (Circle One)

1 Yes
2 No (Skip to Variable #9)

CODING NOTE: If weather or sports anchor come on set to introduce breaking news, you SHOULD count this as a reporter introducing the story. If regular news anchor from THAT newscast introduces his/her own piece, code "no". If anchor from another newscast comes on to deliver a story, acting as a "reporter," code Yes.)

If yes, write name of reporter:
____

V8 If Story is delivered by a reporter, from where does he/she introduce story?

1 In the station (On set/Side Set/Chroma Key/Newsroom/Satellite center, Weather Porch)
2 Live in the Field (Via Video Phone, Fiber, Microwave, or Satellite)
3 Other (Phone, Straight pkg, other)/Cannot Determine

V9 18 Format of Story: (Circle One)

1 Reader (may have over the shoulder graphic, but NO video or sound bites)
2 VO (anchor or reporter voice over video OR full screen graphics, including weather graphics)(If story is delivered by reporter live in

the field, and they pan the camera to show visuals of the scene around them, code as VO)

3 VO/SOT or VO/SOT/VO (has video and sound bite)(Live: video and live interview, code as this)

4 SOT ONLY (has a sound bite but no accompanying, pre-recorded video)(If live reporter does not show "visuals" of the scene by panning off of the reporter, but has a live interview, code as this.)

5 ANCHOR PKG (Complete story on tape, pre-packaged by anchor. This is ONLY appropriate if the anchor is currently "on set" as part of the present newscast. If the person anchors another newscast, but is being brought on as a "reporter," code as Reporter PKG instead.)

6 REPORTER PKG (Complete story on tape, pre-packaged by reporter)(Count an anchor as a reporter IF, and only if, that person anchors another newscast, not the present one).

7 Other/Don't Know

CODING NOTE: If story has multiple elements, select the "highest" order option. For example, if story has vo leading into a reporter live in the field, who introduces his or her "package," code for #6/Reporter PKG.

V10 19-20 Dominant Topic of Story/News Category: (TWO digits please)

01 Crime (Breaking "Spot" news of crime, developments with criminals/courts/trials/police)

02 Accidents, & Incidents (General "Spot" news coverage not focused on criminal activity, such as house fires, car accidents, so-called "breaking news")(Accidents involving planes, trains, automobiles, boats, etc., including ongoing investigations of same; man-made or unintended incidents, not involving any criminal action, unless DUI, in which case you CAN keep in this category. IF case, such as an "arson fire" goes to trial, however, count that coverage as "crime")

03 Weather &/or Natural Disasters (wildfires, floods, snowstorms, etc.)(Not daily weather report)

04 Government/Politics/Campaigns/Elections (bills, laws, or ordinances up for debate/under consideration; controversial government action; political malfeasance; welfare, social programs)

05 Construction/Growth/Planning/City Expansion/Roadway Problems/Traffic Congestion (Traffic as an issue: not caused by an accident or daily rush-hour traffic)

06 Traffic Reports: Daily, Rush-hour report

07 Consumer News (product information, warnings, advisories, etc.)

08 Health news/Medical Developments & Breakthroughs

09 Science & Technology (not health related)

10 Education (educational programs, progress, or public policy issues; funding, testing, resources, crime on campus, primarily involving public or private education institutions)
11 Parenting/Family Issues (not education-related, unless pre-K, such as daycare, "smart" kids, etc.)
12 Religion (About institution as an issue, leaders, scandals, etc.)
13 Environment
14 Economics/Finance/Banking/Business/Employment
15 Military News/Military Action/War/Civil Unrest/Hijackings/Terrorism
16 Entertainment (Arts, Culture, books, music, movies, festivals, celebrity news, and the lottery – but only if it is a news story. NOT lottery numbers)
17 Human Interest Stories (people helping people, non-governmental social programs, non-celebrity people profiles, off-the-beaten path stories, interesting places, people, interesting times, etc.)
18 Sports & Recreation (both professional and amature; boating, sailing, outdoor activities, etc.)
19 Humorous/Animals/Bon-Mots/Light-hearted, feel-good stories/Closing words/"Kickers")
20 Non-Dominant Group Issues: Story deals specifically with problems/issues/social realities facing non-dominant groups (not product related): Minorities/Race Relations/Aff. Action; Women's issues Poverty/Homelessness/the Needy; Aging/Seniors; Teens/Children (not parenting related); Sexual Orientation.
99 Cannot determine/Other
21 Public Safety (Issues associated with improving or protecting the public's safety. This category is designed to capture all stories which take crime, accidents, incidents and other breaking news to a higher, more complex, contextual level. For example, a story about a car crash on a local bridge would likely be coded as "Accident/Incident." If, however, the station expands its coverage to discuss ongoing concerns about driver safety and structural integrity of the bridge, the story should be coded as a "Public Safety" concern. The same would be true of plane crashes and such.)

CODING NOTES: How to code for Topic

Code the dominant topic. If you can't decide how to code it, consider what the viewer might think the key issue is. For example, if students are arrested for placing bombs inside a school, you should likely code as 01/Crime instead of 10/Education. Education stories are generally about educational programs or progress or policy issues. Although most government action would be coded as 04, if a city ordinance would affect an environmental issue, you should code as 13/Environment. A plane crash would generally be an 02/Accident, but if it is a military plane, you would probably go with

14/Military. If story is, for example, about a national celebrity who commits a crime, ask yourself, would we be seeing this story if the alleged perpetrator was “John Doe”? If not, code as 15/Entertainment-National versus 01/Crime.

WRITE A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY TOPIC:

WRITE DOWN GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF STORY: (IF IDENTIFIED)

CODING NOTE: Intercoders/coders should write down city, town, region, state or country named in story. You can rely on Verbal AND visual cues for this. Don’t forget to look at graphics/supers for information.

Due to the likelihood that intercoders will not have knowledge of the specific geographic area/cities & communities within the DMA, PRIMARY CODER will take “geographic location of story” information provided above and turn information into the following categories. ICR tests on Geographic location should be run based on actual hand-written location, not likely pre-codes).

V#: VARIABLE DESCRIPTION:

V11 Primary Geographic Location of Story: (Likely Pre-Codes/Circle One)

01 Local DMA #1 (Core Market: Downtown, Jacksonville, Baymeadows, San Marcus, Orange Park, Westside, Northside, Arlington, Jax/Atlantic/Neptune Beaches, Mandarin)
02 Local DMA #2 (Expanded Market/FL: Callahan, St. Augustine, Palatka, Green Cove, Penny Farms, Fernandina, Amelia Island, Middleburg, Lawtey, Waldo, Starke, Keystone Heights, Yulee etc.)
03 Local DMA #3 (Georgia: Brunswick, St. Simons/Jekyll/Sea Island, St. Mary’s, Kingsland, etc.)
04 Entire DMA – no particular location specified
05 Non-Local: State of Florida (outside DMA)
06 Non-Local: State of Georgia (outside DMA)
07 Southeast (outside Florida or Georgia)(Alabama/Louisiana/Mississippi/SC/NC)
08 Elsewhere in the U.S./National

09 International
10 Unable to determine/Not Revealed/Other

V12 Local Relevance of Story: (PEJ Measure/Order Revised w/ changes): (Circle One)

5 Emergency Information (with local OR national relevance), affecting main viewing area, local subgroups or institutions
6 Non-local story (state/regional/national/international) with local impact explained or IMPLIED
7 Non-local story (state/regional/national/international) with no specific local impact (including non-local feature stories)
8 Other/Unable to determine

V13 Enterprise Story or News of the Day? (My variable)

1 News of the Day (Based on a recent news event or development in an ongoing story. Might be unusual angle, but code here if it is likely some other news organization might cover the same/a similar story).
2 Enterprise Story (Based on some broader concept/issue not specifically related to news of the day. May, however, take a newsworthy story and broaden it considerably. Often investigative, in-depth stories, news series, or station projects).

V14 Local Station Enterprise (PEJ Measure/Categories combined): (Circle One)

3 Investigations, In-Depth Interviews, In-Depth stories, news series or station projects
(Most Active)
4 News of the Day/Spontaneous coverage/Pre-arranged events (press conferences, court hearings/sentencing, pre-planned PR opportunities, press releases etc.)
(Less Active)
5 Wire/Feed: Material provided by other news organizations or Video News Releases (Passive)
6 Cannot Determine/Other

CODING NOTE: Code #1 if the story is based on some broader concept/issue not specifically about "news of the day." For example, if the reporter takes a timely topic, using a "news peg", and broadens it out to a larger, unusual, or time-consuming and more labor-intensive treatment than one would expect with "daybook" stories, code as #1. Any time a station is doing something “special,” as in the case of ratings investigations, special station projects, larger community concerns that the station has CLEARLY taken extra time to develop. Highly “promotable” material the station airs, often meant to distinguish itself from the competition. Clear Enterprise.

Code #2: This category involves stories that are more commonplace, such as spot news, general “day of stories” that are likely the result of standard “beat” systems, such as crime/courts coverage… stories which other stations are likely to cover on the same day and generally the same manner. If station takes EXTRA time and/or energy to tell the story by expanding upon the issue, then code as #1 instead. For example, if a recent spate of burglaries is discussed, this would be #2. However, if station does an expanded project on how to protect yourself and your property…and it’s a story that likely took more than a single news day to produce, code as #1.

Code #3: If the station does NOT cover story with a reporter, and story is 100 miles away, it is most likely that story came from another news organization and was provided via a news-sharing system. Code as #3/Wire/Feed/Other Organization. If local news organization provides material as part of news sharing/joint projects, code as #3/Other organization.

It is important to distinguish between "hard hit" live shots, which are frequently featured at the top of newscasts (and typically involve spontaneous events of a national scope) and are detailed reports of some sort, but are provided by feed services, such as an affiliate or ownership group. This can be difficult to detect, as some reporters "sig out" by saying "For 12 News, I'm Charlotte Roach in Savannah." This does not mean the reporter actually works for the station, but that the station made arrangements for that reporter to do a report in their newscast. This is not an example of local enterprise and should be coded as #3/Wire/Feed.

CODING NOTE: How to code for on-camera sources

The purpose of this coding scheme is to identify those people who the station identifies as being important enough (or necessary) to the story. You will ONLY code sources if they speak directly to the camera or are quoted directly within the story. For example, if you hear "police say" but do NOT see an officer speaking to the camera, do NOT count as an on camera source.

V15 First Source: "Type"

1 = Private Individuals, non-expert such as eyewitness/neighbor or friend/victim
2 = Politicians or candidates
3 = Political activists as individual (versus representative of a group)

4 = Spokespersons, experts and authorities (affiliated with an organization or institution; members of professions, specialists; interviewed because of their expertise on a topic).

5 = Celebrities (including entertainers, authors, actors, and sports figures)
6 = Unable to identify/Other

V16 First Source: Race/Ethnicity

1 = White	2 = African-American	3 = Latino/Hispanic
4 = Asian-American	5 = Native American	6 = Unable to determine/Other

V17	**First Source: Gender**	1=Male			2=Female		
V18	**Second Source: "Type"**	1	2	3	4	5	6
V19	**Second Source: Race/Ethnicity**	1	2	3	4	5	6
V20	**Second Source: Gender**	1 = Male		2 = Female			
V21	**Third Source: "Type"**	1	2	3	4	5	6
V22	**Third Source: Race/Ethnicity**	1	2	3	4	5	6
V23	**Third Source: Gender**	1 = Male		2 = Female			
V24	**Fourth Source: "Type"**	1	2	3	4	5	6
V25	**Fourth Source: Race/Ethnicity**	1	2	3	4	5	6
V26	**Fourth Source: Gender**	1 = Male		2 = Female			

V27 Total Number of Sources Interviewed or Quoted ("Directly") _____

V28 Length of Story: Write Down Time in Minutes/Seconds ___ : ___ ___

Time Converted into Seconds ___ ___ ___

CODING NOTES: How to Time the Story

Time the story from the first word out of the anchor's mouth about that story, regardless of what is happening visually. For example, in "world wraps," with multiple stories, the director or technical director may have been late in taking the next video tape, so we want to rely on the amount of news copy.
Zero the timer at the very first word. If you are using a tape machine which counts frames as well as seconds/minutes, when/if reader says "frames per second" are 0-14, round down. If "frames per second" are 15-29, round up.

Include anchor or reporter question and answer AND chat out of the story in total running time IF it relates to the previous story, including if the anchors say "Thanks Dave."

Again, if lead story has video or sound in what we call a "cold open," your timing begins when anchor starts speaking.

If anchor uses a voice over then transitions into reporter in the field, code as one story and start timer at beginning of the first section of the story.

FOR PURPOSES OF INTERCODER RELIABILITY, TIMING DECISIONS WITHIN :02 SECONDS OF EACH OTHER CONSTITUTE AGREEMENT.

NEWSCAST SYNOPSIS CODING INFORMATION:

For each newscast, code the following:

V29 Total # of News Stories ___ ___

V30 Total # of DIFFERENT Reporters featured ___ ___

(In a given newscast, how many different reporters are featured?)

V31 Total time/Sports Actual Time ___ : ___ ___ In Seconds ___ ___ ___

(Do NOT include teases in total time, especially when embedded in part of a "what's ahead" type tease. DO include if sports anchor comes on early within the news block to promote a portion of a story coming up later in the newscast.)

V32 Total time/Weather Actual Time ___ : ___ ___ In Seconds ___ ___ ___

(Do NOT include block-ending teases in total time, especially when embedded in part of a "what's ahead" type tease. DO include 1st weather segment if anchor appears early to promo. DO include final weather at end of newscast if included, such as 5-day forecast).

V33 Total time/Commercials Actual Time ___ : ___ ___ In Seconds ___ ___ ___

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